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THE PERSPECTIVES OF PRACTICING AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE
SUPERINTENDENTS IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA REGARDING THE
IMPACT OF SPIRITUALITY ON THEIR LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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ABSTRACT

THE PERSPECTIVES OF PRACTICING AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA REGARDING THE IMPACT OF SPIRITUALITY ON THEIR LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
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This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to discover how African American female superintendents in Virginia integrated spirituality into their leadership practices. The struggles and experiences of these women as a population have been uniquely marginalized by both race and gender. These distinct influences have resulted in the development of generations of women who freely proclaim to be grounded in the spiritual. To investigate this topic, data were collected in face-to-face interviews conducted on site in the school division where each superintendent was employed. The data were analyzed using a modified version of Moustakas as proposed by Creswell (2007). Once the interviews were coded for themes, two distinctive themes emerged regarding the leadership practices of these women and the integration of spirituality. Theme One addressed the characteristics of the participants' spiritual belief systems and their relationship with God according to how they conceptualized the abstract concept of spirituality and used it in their professional decision-making processes. Theme Two

delineated more precisely how these women used their personal beliefs to lead from a spiritual center. The discoveries that surfaced via this study add greater validation to Benefiel's (2005) theory pertaining to spiritual leadership, which emphasizes the actions of the leader who relies on spiritual leadership. This leader-centered perspective contrasts with Fry and Whittington (2005), who suggested that spiritual leadership cannot be understood without also considering the perspectives of those being led. In summary, this study found that each of these women led from a spiritual center and professed to practice spiritual leadership. In other words, they made and carried out decisions that resulted in the fostering of successful school divisions without compromising their biblical principles. They believed that a leader must be more than a managerial or an instructional leader. A leader must lead from within, while at the same time considering the affective aspects of leadership that encompass the whole person and the needs of the entire organization.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The educational enterprise is currently in need of a different form of leadership in order to guide school divisions in the 21st century. The enactment of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act has resulted in a need for leaders who possess a more global vision of the types of practices that can effectively address the whole individual—both academically and socio-emotionally. This mandate, however, has become increasingly difficult to successfully implement since the U.S. is currently facing challenging economic times, which has resulted in a greater percentage of people living at or below the poverty line. “During a time of downsizing and lack of job security and loyalty, people are hungry for meaning in their lives” (Klenke, 2003, p.59). Poverty and low socioeconomic status are often linked to the emergence of a population segment with greater social and emotional needs. As society continues to recognize its responsibility to address issues of disparity and provide care and support for all its children, perhaps leaders will begin to embrace the legitimacy of spirituality in the area of educational leadership practices.

Although a number of scholars have investigated spiritual leadership as a viable and effective form of leadership, the literature is sparse regarding an operational definition of spiritual leadership. Fry and Whittington (2005b) put forth a theory of spiritual leadership that can be described as “the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one self and others so they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership” (p.22). They also described the components of spiritual leadership, which was earlier outlined by Fry (2003), as conveying the following attributes:

creating a vision wherein leaders and followers experience a sense of calling that their life has meaning and makes a difference; establishing as social/organizational culture

based on the values of altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for BOTH self and others. (p. 22-23)

Equally important, a review of the literature revealed very little information on the impact of spirituality on the leadership practices of Virginia's African American female superintendents. As such, I believed these women could serve as a fertile population group to study with respect to the spiritual leadership they provided for their students.

Dantley (2005) described how the interconnected themes of social justice and continuous struggle are entrenched in the culture and annals of African American women. Indeed, the lifelong achievements of Dorothy Height, who President Obama described as the "Godmother of Civil Rights" and who died in April 2010, provides one such example (Office of the Press Secretary, 2010). Moreover, because the field of education lacked germane research and rich portraiture capturing spiritual leadership in action, it was deemed both useful and timely to discover how spirituality impacted the leadership styles and practices of a select group of African American female superintendents governing in Virginia. Although challenging, I concluded that further study was needed to achieve a greater understanding of spiritual leadership and the constructs that comprise this form of leadership.

Statement of the Purpose

This study examined the spirituality-based leadership styles of African American female superintendents in Virginia. Additionally, this study sought to discover how these superintendents integrated spirituality into their leadership practices. It was expected that these women would illuminate the concept of spirituality as derived from their personal experiences as

superintendents of diverse school divisions. “Since we have an impact on others, we must be sensitive to what we do, who we are and how we go about our business. That is the essence of spiritual leadership” (Houston, 2002, p.8).

Organization of the Study

Literature Review

The literature review, examines the constructs of spirituality from a myriad of perspectives. The review, which includes the opinions of a number of scholars in the field, examines the multifaceted nature of spirituality to provide an understanding of the phenomenon of spiritual leadership. As will be discussed, spiritual leadership is but one form of authentic leadership that to some degree is grounded in servant and transformational leadership theories.

The spiritual leadership model developed by Fairholm (1997), along with spiritual leadership theories created by Fry (2003) and Benefiel (2005), are presented as a foundation to promote an understanding of spiritual leadership as it exists in the business sector. Research studies conducted by various scholars in the business world and in the field of education recommend that leaders embrace spiritual leadership; yet they are unable to advocate a universal definition of spirituality or spiritual leadership. Although none can unequivocally define the concept of spiritual leadership, many continue to tout its effectiveness and cite historical references as to its utilization. The existing literature, therefore, revealed a need to expand our knowledge base regarding spiritual leadership—if for no other reason than to continue the quest to move towards an accepted understanding of the phenomenon.

Spiritual leadership is a relatively new form of leadership that merits additional research in order to be received as a viable practice. Through this study, I examined how spirituality

impacted the leadership practices of a select group of individuals, namely African American female school superintendents. My goal was to expand our knowledge of the concept of spiritual leadership and its constructs so that the practices of these successful women might be replicated by others who are seeking to become more inclusive school leaders. A phenomenological study was deemed to be the most appropriate methodology for exploring the phenomenon of spiritual leadership

Methodology

This research study was based on three questions: (1) whether African American female superintendents in Virginia describe their leadership styles as being of a spiritual nature; (2) if they do, how do the perspectives and actions of these women contribute to our understanding of spirituality in a leadership context; and (3) how do African American female superintendents define and enact spiritual leadership in regards to their daily leadership practices. A phenomenological study design was used to discover the answers to the proposed questions, which was expected to enhance our understanding of the notion of spiritual leadership. Specifically, this qualitative study used semi-structured interview questions to explore the perceptions of African American female superintendents practicing in Virginia. The interview protocols' reliability, validity and procedures, as well as the data collection analysis and procedures, are detailed in Section 3.

Assumptions

This study features a number of assumptions. First, it was assumed that the five African American female superintendents who were involved in this study would be willing to discuss the role of spirituality and the leadership practices they relied on to govern their school divisions.

Second, it was assumed that participants would be able to articulate and elaborate upon the meaning of spiritual leadership and spirituality. Third—and perhaps most importantly—it was assumed that I would be able to remove all personal bias and objectively interpret the information that these five women shared in their interviews. Having revealed my perspectives regarding spirituality and its impact on my leadership and decision-making processes will provide a greater opportunity for those who are consumers of this research to interpret the analysis of the findings that have emerged.

Limitations of the Study

This study targeted the views of African American female superintendents in Virginia. At the time this study was conducted, there were five African American female superintendents practicing in Virginia who agreed to participate in this study, which resulted in a small sample size. This study, therefore, may not be generalizable to superintendents practicing in the United States. Nonetheless, due to the small percentage of African American women who actually lead school divisions nationally, it may be generalizable to that specific population of leaders who profess to be spiritual leaders. This study will contribute to the body of literature regarding spiritual leadership and increase our understanding of the phenomenon and its impact on leadership practices of superintendents serving in Virginia's public school systems.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

With the exception of the 1999 work of Smith and the 1997 work of Fairholm, who is widely considered to be the father of spiritual leadership, this literature review only includes the work of scholars investigating spirituality and spiritual leadership that are pursuant to those years. Thus, this scholarly review used relatively recent reports to (1) discuss the foundations of spiritual leadership, (2) to review the purposeful selection of participants involved in studies devoted to this topic, and (3) to interpret the various limitations found within the current literature. Existing efforts to establish the merits of spirituality as it applies to educational leadership are summarized. This literature review also provides examples of past and present practices of spiritual leadership as a rationale for using spiritual leadership versus other forms of authentic leadership in the future. Additionally, the research questions designed for this study and the methodology used to carry out this research are expected to contribute to the existing literature on spiritual leadership. It was also expected that this study would add clarity to the complex phenomenon described as spiritual leadership.

The African American Female and the Spirit

The participant cohort chosen for this research was not an arbitrary decision. African American females were purposefully selected as participants for this study due to their traditional reliance on spiritual support, which has its roots in the slave trade (Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, & Tyson, 2000). According to research, African Americans of both genders embraced the spiritual to help deal with the atrocities they suffered and to make meaning of the horrendous and dehumanizing conditions that were thrust upon them (Milner, 2006; Smith, 1999). The literature is full of studies that document the physical and psychological abuses that African Americans

endured at the hands of their enslavers (Montgomery, 2005; Smith). As the title of this research clearly indicates, however, only African American females were selected to participate in this research. One may question the justification for delimiting this study's cohort based on gender. Why would women possess a greater propensity to share their experiences with spirituality and how it has impacted them? After all, both African American women and men experienced injustices and atrocities during this era—and both relied on spiritual support to help them survive. Why, therefore, does this study target African American women?

In answer to that question, I would argue that no one can claim to have experienced greater emotional and psychological suffering during the early history of Blacks in this country than African American women. Throughout almost four centuries of slavery, women were used as little more than brood mares to maintain or increase the slave labor force. Their children (sometimes fathered by their White masters through rape) were often separated from them and sold with no regard for the emotional toil this produced. In addition, most women performed arduous field labor, typically working from dawn to dusk. Through all of these trials and tribulations, historical accounts show that African American women continued to rely on their spirituality to sustain them. They embraced the notion that there was a higher power who gave them hope for a better tomorrow (Milner, 2006; Montgomery, 2005; Smith, 1999). This resiliency is also noted today.

Despite its horrors, slavery can be viewed as having embedded in African American women a resolute trust in God—as presence who could be relied on in the most desperate circumstances for comfort and support (Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, & Tyson, 2000). This is not to say that African American men were not impacted in this way—or that this belief is any less

prevalent in other cultures or religious traditions—but studies do support the deep historical roots of spirituality among African American women.

Based on this premise, therefore, it was reasonable to purposefully select this population to openly share their perspectives on spirituality as it related to their chosen profession—particularly since the road to superintendency is not typically an easy one. Indeed, these women have broken through the glass ceiling and now assume roles that historically have been owned by Caucasian men. Typically, As African American women strive to attain such positions, they are faced with obstacles and injustices—which although dwarfed by the abuses their ancestors faced as slaves—are nonetheless challenging. African American women still experience a marked disparity in attaining one of the highest positions in K-12 public education. Thus, there is still a great deal of work to be done to level the playing field. In short, perhaps the experiences of these women will serve as a catalyst for those who aspire to the superintendency, thereby encouraging them to embrace their spirituality and allowing it to be an integral part of their leadership epistemologies.

As history has delineated, these women represent the legacy of their foremothers, women who experienced unspeakable injustices since their arrival in this country...and who now continue to experience struggles in the 21st century. Similar to their ancestors, the African American women who agreed to take part in this study had the tenacity to persevere in spite of the challenges set before them, and have now secured their seat as a superintendent of a public school division in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Their views were expected to lend insightful information regarding the impact of spirituality on their leadership practices and decision making processes.

Spirituality

The role of spiritual leadership as a potentially integral component of the education enterprise is in need of exploration. To understand spiritual leadership, one must first seek to gain an understanding of the intangible and mystical concept of spirituality and the complex nature of leadership. As asserted by Klenke (2003), however, the multifaceted and individualized nature of both spirituality and leadership made it difficult to promulgate a universal definition for either concept. Although there is a vast amount of literature regarding the field of leadership as a whole, this study only used selected aspects of this body of knowledge in seeking to gain a greater understanding of the construct of spirituality that is integral to the development of spiritual leadership. While some scholars only define spirituality in terms of religion, many purport that spirituality should not necessarily be defined so narrowly (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Dent, Higgins & Wharff, 2005; Fairholm, 1997; Huitt & Robbins, 2003; Klenke; Rezbach, 2002; Shields, 2005; Simmons, 2010; Smith, 2007). Klenke found the following:

Spirituality, for example, is not religion. Nor is it unique to a particular religion or culture. Organized religion looks outward: depends on rites and scripture; and tends to be dogmatic, exclusive, and narrowly based on a formalized set of beliefs and practices. Spirituality, on the other hand, looks inward, tends to be inclusive and more universally applicable, and embraces diverse expressions of interconnectedness. (p. 59)

Nearly every day we read reports on how public school systems are endeavoring to comply with constitutional mandates related to the separation of church and state. That is why it is important to stress that this study focused on spirituality as a construct that is not based solely in religiosity. Although spirituality and religion are not one and the same, one must recognize that much of what many purport to believe is derived from an individual's religious beliefs or

lack thereof (Klenke, 2003). It is duly noted that this is often an area of contention as public school educators and administrators grapple with this issue of the separation of church and state.

It is ironic that education has become embroiled in the battles over the separation of church and state, when so much of what we do in education is akin to work of the churches. School leadership focuses on the substance of what it means to be human and to live together harmoniously in this world. Education isn't about the skills we teach, it is about the spirits we nurture. (Houston, 2001, p.433)

Throughout this quest for an operational definition of spirituality, scholars have found that spirituality has different meanings for different people. Fairholm (1997) provided one of the first definitions of leadership as tied to spirituality when he asserted: "Leaders recognize the process of living out deeply held personal values, or honoring forces or a presence greater than self" (p. 107). Bolman and Deal (2001) proposed a paradoxical definition of spirituality. "Spirituality is beyond us and yet is in everything we do. It is ordinary, and yet it is extraordinarily simple" (p. 44). Simmons (2010) provided a more simplistic definition of spirituality when she identified it as "something that gives you a measure of something greater than yourself. You are accountable to you and something greater than you" (WELV presentation).

Spirituality is a concept that is personal and uniquely relevant to the person who is living the experience. This characteristic alone creates the confusion surrounding the creation of a universal definition (Rezach, 2002). The literature has loosely defined spirituality as the journey to make meaning of life, through which one recognizes transcendence as an integral part of that meaning-making process that manifest itself outwardly by the actions and virtues displayed by the individual (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Fairholm, 1997; Hoyle, 2002; Huitt & Robbins, 2003;

Klenke, 2003; Rezach; Smith, 2007; Solomon & Hunter, 2002; Wheatley, 2002). Huitt and Robbins introduced several different perspectives regarding spirituality; they range from “an attempt to understand and connect to the unknowns of the universe or search for meaningfulness in one’s life (Adler, 1932/1980; Frankl, 1950) to a relationship with the sacred (Beck & Walter, 1977)” (p. 3). As Smith asserted:

Spirituality allows people to understand their world, making meaning of their lives, and understand their part in the universe. Another theme of spirituality is of connectedness – to self, others, and the universe. Spiritual leaders draw upon their own values to inform their individual and professional behavior. (p. 30-31)

Although related themes exist and threads of similar vocabulary are evidenced in the literature, a universally-accepted definition of spirituality continues to elude researchers. However, these scholars can agree that spirituality does encompass interconnectedness, great moral/ethical virtues, and transcendence. In summary, it is clear that spirituality remains an elusive phenomenon, thus contributing to the complexity of comprehending spiritual leadership.

Spiritual Leadership

According to Fry and Whittington (2005b), spiritual leadership is but one form of a social-scientific approach to leadership. Many of the concepts embedded within spiritual leadership theories parallel the body of literature that seeks to integrate the various elements associated with spirituality and leadership. The literature shows that spiritual leadership is a complex entity that fosters membership and belonging. Stokley (2002) placed an emphasis on community and the values and beliefs espoused by that community. The community is what allows the leader to lead. The leader’s ability to guide his or her community in meaningful ways that promote personal growth can concurrently enable them to experience a heightened sense of

spiritual growth. Effective leadership also promotes empowerment and collegiality, which are necessary elements for the progression of an educational organization. As Stokley also asserted: “The spiritual leader must view those with whom he or she works in a positive light and not be judgmental or critical unless there is sufficient cause. This approach is empowering and builds confidence in others” (p. 4).

Many leaders who use a social scientific approach to leadership are often intrinsically motivated as they strive to positively influence those who are being led. Fullan (2002) posited that the future of the evolving educational enterprise will rest upon the belief that spiritual leadership is an integral component of the continual process of cultivating ownership. It is critical to examine what motivates teachers to work tirelessly to perfect their craft. Any proposed changes to the system must be systemic and all stakeholders must be intrinsically driven toward those ends. Fullan also spoke about the meaning of “moral purpose writ large” in the following way: “[He uses] the somewhat cumbersome phrase ‘moral purpose writ large’ to indicate we are talking about principled behaviors connected to something greater than ourselves that relates to human and social development” (p. 14).

Lastly—and perhaps most importantly—spiritual leaders possess values and vision that are expressed by their actions. According to Thompson (2005):

Spiritual leadership means leading from those deeper levels, and it is the purposeful actions and behaviors that naturally follow from doing so. This kind of leadership calls for qualities and habits of mind that generally have been overlooked in the leadership literature and seminars: faith, patience, intuition, humility, expectancy, inspiration, compassion and yes, spirituality. (p. 26)

Although the literature presents spiritual leadership through a myriad of lenses, Rezach (2002) stated that “perhaps there is truly a universal definition of spiritual leadership, one which correlates the need to recognize a higher being, to know oneself , and then to extend oneself to others in service” (p. 30). Despite such a lofty goal, scholars have been unable to purport a universal definition of spiritual leadership. Nonetheless, their contributions to the literature have decreased the ambiguity that surrounds this authentic leadership practice.

Historical Depictions of Spiritual Leadership

Although the concept of spiritual leadership as evidenced in literature examining leadership practices in the workplace has really only emerged during the late 20th century, it is not a new practice. Indeed, spiritual leadership has clearly been the leadership style in the religious sector since the beginning of time. If one subscribes to the King James Version of the Bible, one sees elements of spiritual leadership in such persons as Moses, who successfully and courageously led his of people out of Egypt.

He was born a Hebrew slave, adopted by the Pharaoh’s daughter, and educated in the house of the king. He failed at an attempt to take a role of leadership over the Israelites and spent 40 years as a shepherd in the desert. At last Moses is ready for leadership and, at a burning bush, receives his call to lead the nation of Israel. (George, 2006, p. 16)

Moses, a Jew, was a man who believed that he had a destiny and a calling to lead. However, most, if not all, great religions have claimed great leaders who have done amazing works and who universally have attributed their relentless determination and success to a power beyond themselves. Elements of spiritual leadership that were prevalent during biblical times are still present in the leadership practices of a great many contemporary school superintendents.

As a minister's son, I realized early in my own career as a superintendent that there are a great many spiritual overtones to the superintendency. The ultimate responsibility of the role is to shepherd other people's children through the often dangerous valley of childhood. So it is easy to see religious symbolism in the role. (Houston, 2001, p. 429)

This transcendence is clearly observed in modern times with respect to the church. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. a minister and civil rights activist, is most noted for his pivotal role in the advancement of African American people in the U.S. "Out of the segregated crucible of Atlanta's black ghetto, a young man emerged with national and international visibility who was destined to lead his people and nation out of the bitter experience of racial oppression into a new era of freedom" (Paris, 2008, p.17). Paris, however, also described a greater force that motivated Martin Luther King, Jr. to lead a cause that would benefit others and eventually cause his own demise.

For little more than a decade he saturated the nation's public arenas with thousands of speeches and sermons aimed at clarifying the nature of the moral problem that threatened to destroy the social order. In those prophetic utterances he sought to justify his opposition to racism by appealing to the principles in the nation's founding documents reinforced by the biblical symbols of love, justice, and hope in his black church tradition. (Paris, 2008, p. 17)

Beyond the pulpit, one can look toward the era of slavery where fearless leaders sacrificed themselves to lead others to freedom. These spiritual leaders had faith, hope, and a belief that there was a power that would give them the strength to successfully accomplish the greatest triumph. Harriet Tubman immediately comes to mind.

In 1849, Tubman escaped on the Underground Railroad from Maryland to Philadelphia in the free state of Pennsylvania by traveling at night using the North Star as her guide.

After she gained her own freedom, Tubman became a “conductor” for the Underground Railroad. She subsequently made 13 return trips to the South and rescued as many as 300 other slaves. In 1863, she led the successful Combahee River Raid that freed more than 750 slaves. (Northouse, 2009, p. 13)

Something in her spirit caused her to rise up and make the decision to endanger her life for the well being of others.

Devoted to her cause, she repeatedly risked her own life to bring freedom to others. She was determined, focused, spiritual, and strong. Throughout her leadership, there was the mix of the spiritual and the practical. On the one hand, she believed in divine guidance; on the other, she was very practical and methodical in her approach to tasks. (Northouse, p. 14)

And this type of spiritual influence can be evidenced in the lives of many African American leaders, including those heading our public schools.

Rationale for the Utilization of Spiritual Leadership

Authentic leadership is defined as the outcome of a leader who holds true to his or her values and governs those that are led according to those unwavering beliefs. This form of leadership, clearly, has its advantages and disadvantages. If one possesses core values and attitudes that translate to positive outcomes for society, i.e., these values and virtues are accepted and desired by society as a whole, then it stands to reason that an authentic leader would be a successful leader in the business or educational sector. However, if the authentic leader hangs on to a belief system that is outside of the mainstream values that have been accepted over time to

positively contribute to society, there's a good chance that this individual could lead the business or educational enterprise to its demise. A number of leadership models can be described as derivatives of authentic leadership. Spiritual leadership, for example, is one of many forms of authentic leadership that include such models as transformational and servant leadership. Although both of these models have been compared to spiritual leadership and do share some similarities, they are visibly different in regards to their areas of focus.

Servant Leadership and Transformational Leadership

Servant leadership and transformational leadership do possess similar characteristics, but they are clearly distinct from spiritual leadership. With respect to the first concept, servant leadership, many scholars posit that the premise of servant leadership requires leaders to present themselves as servants first and foremost if they are to be effective leaders (Fry & Whittington, 2005b; Hawkins, 2009; Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004; Spears, 2004). Scholars who have examined transformational leadership concur that such leaders must be able to humanely transform the enterprise and serve as an inspirational entity while at the same time focusing on the bottom line (Fry & Whittington; Hawkins; Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko). This kind of leadership is often equated to productivity and profit in the business sector or academic success in the educational enterprise. Servant leadership and transformational leadership have threads of spirituality flowing through their models that allow those practitioners to lead in a positive manner regardless of their core personal beliefs. However, because spirituality is the core of spiritual leadership, this form of leadership can be effectively practiced in a myriad of settings. Stated a little differently, spirituality is a focal point rather than a thematic component of spiritual leadership. As such, it results in a form of leadership that allows leaders to take into account the goals of servant and transformational leadership without having to make a distinction in terms of

which is most important. The decisions and actions of spiritual leaders are not merely guided by the need to serve; nor are they driven by the desire to transform an organization during turbulent times. Such ideas become inconsequential, as spiritual leaders are able to lead regardless of circumstance or context. These individuals understand in a profound way that there is something greater than themselves or their circumstances that will enable them to rise to any challenge, regardless of the environment—be it the business sector or the field of education—and lead from the soul.

Extending Spiritual Leadership-Models and Theories

Klenke (2003) touted Fairholm (1997) as one of the pioneers of the school of thought regarding spiritual leadership...an individual who recognized the strength of combining spirituality and leadership. This literature review, therefore, would be incomplete without discussing the findings of this scholar. To summarize, Fairholm concluded that it is impossible to divorce spirituality from the workplace as it is the crux of who we are as living people. He asserted that spiritual leadership is a necessary practice for 21st century because it utilizes servant leadership epistemologies as well as other forms of transformational leadership styles that encompass a holistic approach to leadership.

Fairholm (1997) suggested a model of spiritual leadership involving eight components, each with a number of defining qualities. The eight aspects of spiritual leadership include the following: (1) fostering community, (2) possessing competence, (3) striving for continuous improvement, (4) requiring high moral standards, (5) recognizing the importance of being a servant, (6) embracing and enhancing spirituality, (7) nurturing stewardship, and (8) cultivating visioning. Following Fairholm's descriptions of spirituality and spiritual leadership, Fry (2003)

and Benefiel (2005) both developed more recent theories pertaining to spiritual leadership, making them respected researchers in the field.

Fry (2003) proposed a theory of spiritual leadership that sought to provide the necessary response to what he observed as a need in the workplace for a more encompassing form of leadership. He lends further evidence to the need for spiritual leadership as he examines various forms of leadership models in an effort to reveal the inclusive nature of spiritual leadership. In advocating the incorporation of spiritual leadership in the workplace, he made a distinction between spirituality and religion. He asserted (as many other researchers have done) that one does not have to practice a specific religion to embrace or exhibit spirituality. Nor did Fry argue for a uniquely theistic definition of God:

Spiritual leadership theory can be viewed in part as a response to the call for a more holistic leadership that helps to integrate the four fundamental arenas that define the essence of human existence in the workplace- the body (physical), mind (logical/rational thought), heart (emotions; feelings), and spirit. (p. 722)

In a later study, Fry and Whittington (2005b) expounded upon the theory of spiritual leadership previously developed by Fry. As the researchers maintained:

Spiritual leadership taps into the fundamental needs of both leader and follower for spiritual survival through calling and membership. It seeks to create vision and value congruence across the individual, empowered team and organization levels and, ultimately, to foster higher levels of organizational commitment and productivity. A major proposition of spiritual leadership theory is that spiritual leadership is necessary for the transformation to and continued success of learning organizations. Operationally, spiritual leadership comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to

intrinsically motivate one's self and others so they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership. (p. 22)

Although Benefiel (2005) found Fry's (2003) concept of spiritual leadership to be acceptable, she maintained that a greater emphasis must be placed on the study of spirituality since it is an integral part of the spiritual leadership construct. Benefiel has contributed to the literature by not only addressing the qualitative versus quantitative debate, but also by enhancing the spirituality aspect of spiritual leadership. According to Benefiel, Fry placed too great an emphasis on the leadership literature regarding spiritual leadership. Instead, she claimed that spiritual leadership should focus on the transformational process of the leader, which would better enable that individual to lead from his or her spiritual center. Benefiel described the process that spiritual leaders experience as they embark upon their spiritual journey as a series of five distinct stages.

Stage I: Awakening (becomes aware of spiritual realities; seeks connections with others on spiritual quest; fullness);

Stage II: Transition (sense of isolation; questioning spiritual path; emptiness);

Stage III: Recovery (discovery of new ways of relating to ultimate reality; connectedness with others on spiritual path; renewed joy; fullness);

Stage IV: Dark Night (spiritual practices not yielding transformation; deeper core questions emerge; emptiness);

Stage V: Dawn (self gets revitalized to higher good; sense of connectedness with the universe; sense of alignment with transcendent power; new ways of making meaning emerge; fullness). (p. 733)

In summary, Benefiel championed the idea that the spiritual leader will experience these stages and emerge a better, stronger leader who is focused on the higher good. Many of these models and theories have been developed as a result of studies conducted in the business sector (Benefiel; Fairholm, 1997; Fry). However, recent investigations have expanded that focus to include education. Rshaid (2009), for example, has investigated the role of spirituality in education.

Spiritual Leadership and the Business Sector

As suggested by its name, spiritual leadership could be considered a somewhat mysterious concept by business leaders who are accustomed to facts, figures, bottom line outcomes and other quantifiable measures of success. Interestingly, however, this enigmatic form of leadership has been welcomed into the business sector, which realized the merits of this style of leadership with respect to the productivity and well-being of the company.

“Traditionally, economic or technological considerations are the driving forces for implementing major organizational changes that led to new economies of scale and higher productivity. Only recently has spirituality been considered to be a driver of productivity” (Klenke, 2003, p. 57). In fact, many researchers have found that the utilization of spiritual leadership and integration of spirituality into the business sector was met, in many instances, with a heightened productivity that translated to an overall positive experience (Franklin, 2009; Issacson, 2001; Quinnine, 2007; Thankappan, 2005). The following studies lend credence to the positive impact of the integration of spirituality and leadership in organizations.

Franklin (2009) sought to discover whether and how the leadership practices of business leaders who believed in a higher power were impacted by those beliefs. A qualitative study using a grounded theory approach examined 25 executives at the helm of organizations that ranged

from major corporations to small start-up businesses. The study also included one university leader. Seven themes emerged as a result of this study that clearly supported how the belief systems of these executives—all of whom claimed to practice spiritual leadership—impacted their day-to-day work practices and leadership styles. Franklin asserted that because these leaders possessed the virtuous characteristics embedded in spiritual leadership, that these leaders could have a long-term positive impact on the prosperity and success of their business or organization.

A qualitative study conducted by Issacson (2001) employed a phenomenological approach to discover how leaders in both the educational and business sectors described spiritual leadership, as well as how their spirituality impacted their leadership practices. She discovered through interactive open-ended interviews with 10 leaders that although they shared many commonalities in beliefs, the ways in which they manifested those beliefs in the work place varied. The study's participants described spiritual leadership as a leader's ability to create a safe and nurturing environment where trust was fostered and colleagues were free to explore, question, and seek their own truths. Issacson also discovered that spiritual leadership is not stagnant—it is fluid and takes on new meaning over time. As noted above, the theme of trust emerged as an integral part of what shapes spiritual leadership. Issacson concluded that “developing a strong sense of spirituality may help educational and organizational leaders and their followers better accept change, possibly with less fear and resistance” (p.131). Accepting change and working together to move an organization forward is imperative to the success of any organization, whether operating from an educational or a business stance.

Quinnine (2007) investigated spiritual leadership within the service sector by soliciting the perspectives of eight business leaders who reported that they practiced spiritual leadership

within their organizations. Specifically, she employed a qualitative study featuring a phenomenological approach to explore how their leadership styles impacted their organizations. It should also be noted that I incorporated the definition of spiritual leadership developed by Fairholm (1997) in an endeavor to create clarity. In summary, using in-depth, semi-structured oral history interviews, she discovered that authenticity—where one aligns values with subsequent practices—was an emerging theme. Her study also revealed that the leaders recognized and embraced the notion that increasing employee satisfaction through fulfilling the individual as whole would inevitably lead to greater productivity and corporate success.

Thankappan (2005) conducted a qualitative study based on a grounded theory approach. She interviewed 34 people in an effort to discover how corporate leaders used spirituality to effect change within their organization. Although this study (like much of the research I assessed) did speak to the separation of religion and spirituality, Thankappan did refer to a belief in a higher power. This study revealed that many of these leaders found that spirituality positively impacted organizational change. The participants added, however, that spiritual leadership was not representative of most leadership styles, but advocated its use in more organizations. Based on this study, it seems clear that spiritual leadership does warrant further investigation as a viable form of leadership for the 21st century.

As a result of the many positive literature reports associated with spiritual leadership in the businesses world, it is now being explored as a leadership style for those in the field of education. “If successful corporate leaders of the 21st century are indeed spiritual leaders, paradigms of spirituality must be reflected in the work of leadership scholars, practitioners and educators” (Klenke, 2003, p.59). This is not an unexpected trend since successful practices in

the business sector have historically been explored by scholars who seek to translate those achievements to the realm of education.

One such literature example can be found in the work of Jim Collins (2001) in his book, “Good to Great.” Collins maintained that at the core of a truly great organization was a corporate culture that rigorously found and promoted disciplined people to think and act in a disciplined manner. He also discussed the notion of “Level 5 Leadership,” as exemplified by leaders who manifest humility and routinely credit their employees for organizational success. Since its appearance almost ten years ago, “Good to Great” has been applied by school leaders who seek to help motivate their staff to embrace the mandates for higher achievement as set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Stephen Covey (1994) further developed the belief that effective leaders should possess certain attributes and behaviors in his book, “The Seven Habits of Successful Leaders.” His research, although it targeted the business sector, shows promise for the field of education, particularly with respect to the characteristics of a Level-5 leader—namely, that such a leader acts calmly and determinedly to inspire the inculcation of standards that motivate. This work has since been embraced by the educational enterprise to help shape leaders that ascribe to the tenets of the Level 5 leaders.

Spiritual leadership is a practice that began to be studied in the business sector. Now, however, its tenets are being examined for use in the field of education, which in the past has been apprehensive about implementing any process that would appear to entangle church and state. However, if spiritual leadership is proving to be an effective form of leadership in the business world, then the call to explore this form of leadership in educational settings is warranted. And, in fact, educational scholars are now examining spiritual leadership in an effort

to unravel the mystery that surrounds this practice, thereby contributing to a decisive body of literature that will foster the practice of leading the educational enterprise in the 21st century from the heart and soul.

Exploration within the Field of Educational Research

As judged by the recentness of the literature reports used in this study, it is clear that spiritual leadership has only recently risen to the forefront of discussions on effective leadership practices. Thus, there is a relative lack of documentation on the impact of spirituality on the leadership practices of African American female superintendents leading in the 21st century. Those that have tackled the topic of spiritual leadership have used both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the quest to discover the nature of spirituality, as well as to develop a greater understanding of spiritual leadership that encompasses the virtues and values that society can embrace (Bonner, 2007; Hooper-Atlas, 2002; Lyon, 2004; Magnusen, 2001; Rezach, 2002; Smith, 2007). I obtained these studies from the Dissertation and Theses Full Text database, which allowed me to access ProQuest to explore and enhance the literature pertaining to spirituality and spiritual leadership in education. These studies also supported the need to further investigate spiritual leadership to attain a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Bonner (2007) conducted a quantitative study that sought to categorize school principals into three different leadership style categories: (1) Leadership Style X, which includes forms of transactional leadership; (2) Leadership Style Y, which encompasses transformational leadership; and (3) Leadership Style Z, described as spiritual leadership. The findings from a five-point Likert survey used to analyze the study's results revealed that the vast majority of the primary and secondary administrators who participated were practitioners of Leadership Style Y (transformational). Bonner concluded that the contradictory nature of his findings could be

attributed to the participants' lack of a true understanding of the tenets and attributes of spiritual leadership, as he discussed below:

What is becoming clear is that it is not that spiritual leadership is meaningless; it is that spiritual leadership has lost its meaning. If the term spiritual leader can mean anything and a leader can be generally unaware of what or why they believe certain things, this would appear to ripple out into serious concerns as to the direction public schools are going in and who is doing the directing. (p. 147)

Bonner's findings clearly reinforced the need to produce research that could contribute to the literature regarding a better conceptualization of spiritual leadership—for example, how it is different or similar to a transformational style of leadership.

Hooper-Atlas (2002) employed a qualitative study that explored the relationship between spirituality and the leadership practices of African American principals, all of whom were female. Specifically, I interviewed five African American women who led public schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. These women all believed they were called to the position of principal. Through her research, Hooper-Atlas discovered that all participants believed in and relied on a higher power to guide their daily leadership practices and decision-making processes. Moreover, this study revealed that spirituality did impact their leadership practices as they attempted to focus on student achievement and relationship-building. According to Hooper-Atlas (2002) "their reliance on spiritual wisdom instead of blindly adhering to laws and policies was grounded in their personal histories and the history of African American people" (p. 155). Despite the fact that Hooper-Atlas did not in the end provide a true, working definition of spiritual leadership, her study did increase the literature regarding the effectiveness of the practice of integrating spirituality and leadership, thereby moving the field closer to a better understanding of spiritual

leadership. It should also be noted that, interestingly, Hooper-Atlas expressed concern that the literature she reviewed for her study neglected to include a focus on both spirituality and education. Therefore, the study described herein involving African American principals could be instrumental in filling that void.

In a subsequent study, Lyon (2004) also sought to add to the literature addressing this under-explored construct. Lyon conducted a qualitative study using a case study approach. The researcher endeavored to create a study that would strengthen the validity of her findings by incorporating several data collection methods. First, she administered one-hour semi-structured and scripted interviews to two award-winning female principals. She then gleaned information from the faculty and staff of each school, as well as obtained journal information from the principals. In addition to collecting data using these techniques, she also made first-hand observations. After analyzing these various forms of data, Lyon discovered that spirituality did impact the leadership practices of these women. This study revealed the specific characteristics associated with spirituality that these leaders possessed, leading her to conclude that even though virtuous characteristics are used in the daily practices of good leaders, they are typically spoken of in secular rather than in spiritual terms. In essence, their spirituality was perceived to have enhanced their exceptional leadership practices, which were ultimately recognized through the awards they had received. As Lyon summarized: “The power of effective leadership behaviors and dispositions is multiplied when they are more clearly circumscribed with a spiritual frame” (p. 253).

Lyon’s (2004) work is also important for another reason. Her study indicated that when asked about spirituality, personnel tended to exhibit a level of uneasiness in their replies. This could be one reason why the undercurrent of spirituality that seems to be flowing through

education is only just beginning to emerge as a force. Even though spirituality has, to some degree, always been an unspoken part of education, it is now beginning to garner the recognition it deserves...much like the “invisible elephant in the room” that has become visible. The late Randy Pausch (1960-2008), author of the upbeat lecture “The Last Lecture: Really Achieving your Childhood Dreams,” once advised his listeners that “When there’s an elephant in the room, introduce him.” In the same way that Lyon called for a more discernible discourse regarding the marriage of spirituality and leadership in the field of education, this study will contribute to the literature regarding the attainment of a greater conceptualization of spiritual leadership.

Magnusen (2001) took a different approach in his study of practicing teachers in Illinois. Magnusen conducted a quantitative study involving 83 separate variables the he used to compare and contrast the components of “effective leadership” with “spiritual leadership.” Specifically, Magnusen utilized the responses of 411 primary and secondary teachers from St. Clair County, Illinois, who voluntarily completed a questionnaire. They were asked to rank-order these variables in terms of importance in the areas of effective leadership and spiritual leadership. His subsequent descriptive and inferential statistical analyses found that the newly-formed model of spiritual leadership was markedly different from the effective leadership model. Moreover, he revealed that many of the qualities or variables associated with effective leadership—routinely touted as necessary for the academic success of a school division, such as communication skills and conflict resolution—were in direct contrast to the most valued variables associated with spiritual leadership, such as faith and inspiration. The study concluded that effective 21st century leaders should not only possess the traditional characteristics associated with effective leadership, but that they should also embrace the traits now being associated with spiritual leadership. As Magnusen asserted:

Spirituality is a good thing. Effective leadership is a good thing. They should not remain mutually exclusive. There is a place for spiritual qualities in effective leadership in schools. Spiritual qualities are needed in school administration if we are to be successful in creating an honorable, equitable school community. (p. 114)

As suggested by Magnusen, since the present study sought to define the qualities and practices of an effective spiritual leader, it was expected to contribute to the acquisition of greater clarity regarding spiritual leadership.

Rezach (2002) chose a mixed-methods approach in her study of a group of independent school principals in New Jersey in order to expand the literature and contribute to a better understanding of spiritual leadership. In particular, Rezach utilized grounded theory to study the usefulness of spiritual leadership as an effective leadership style among her study's cohort. Rezach used the Religious Orientation Survey containing 20 questions to identify the five school leaders who eventually took part in the study. A limitation to incorporating this single survey is the unlikelihood that one instrument would be able to accurately measure one's spirituality. Nonetheless, Rezach interviewed the five independent school leaders and reported the following overarching conclusions. First, no consensus regarding a universal definition for spirituality emerged from her study. Second, even though no specific leadership characteristics were discovered, a leadership style that advocated caring, selflessness and respect was identified. Third, the practices of these five leaders focused on the idea of working in concert with other staff with respect to decision-making process and the fostering of effective organizational relationships. Rezach concluded that spiritual leadership proved to be an effective leadership style for the independent school system principals she studied.

The afore-mentioned studies have utilized teachers and principals from public and independent school settings to explore spirituality and spiritual leadership. Smith (2007), however, focused on school superintendents. Employing the case studies of two superintendents employed by the Pennsylvania Public School Division, Smith utilized a qualitative approach to explore spiritual leadership as an effective leadership style. Smith not only conducted semi-structured interviews with the superintendents, but also interviewed those who worked closely with the superintendents, including the School Board President. Supporting documentation was also collected to add further dimension to the study. Smith reported that both superintendents believed that they had been called to the profession of education. Moreover, the author described the leaders as visionaries who valued community and deeply respected all who were part of the educational enterprise. Smith also found that their definitions of spirituality and spiritual leadership were as unique as the two superintendents who provided them.

To summarize, each of the studies chosen for this literature review has concluded that spiritual leadership was an effective leadership style in education. None, however, has provided a consensual operational definition of the very concept that they so clearly support. Therefore, this study was developed to provide transparency and add clarity to the phenomenon of spiritual leadership as provided through the lens of African American female superintendents.

Implications for the Current Literature

As discussed above, a number of respected scholars have embraced spiritual leadership, regardless of whatever vague definition they have associated with this concept. Despite their endorsement of the practice, there is currently insufficient qualitative and quantitative information regarding this area of study to lead to widespread acceptance of the validity and effectiveness of this form of leadership. As Klenke (2003) asserted, “Though researchers have

been refining measures of leadership for over 50 years, measures of spirituality, for the most part, have yet to achieve comparable psychometric qualities and often have serious problems such as lack of validity, response bias, scale redundancy, and ceiling effects” (p.59). Therefore, more research is needed to contribute to the emerging field of spiritual leadership.

As researchers expand this field of thought, spiritual leadership more will hopefully acquire a clearer understanding—even though it represents the manifestation of two somewhat amorphous concepts: leadership and spirituality. With respect to the first, if researchers who have been studying leadership for over a half a century cannot arrive at a consensus regarding a widely-accepted definition for leadership, then what hope is there for defining the second concept, spirituality? Indeed, the goal of attaining an agreement pertaining to the operational definition of spirituality, which represents a relatively new field of thought, would appear to be inconceivable.

Many scholars have attempted to explain why spirituality remains such a nebulous concept (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005; Klenke, 2003). This lack of one single defining explanation is summarized by Klenke, who argued that “Spirituality is a mosaic of many different aspects of the human existence and means different things to different people” (p.57). She further concluded that “The leadership scholar is challenged by the diverse, conflicting, and often overlapping definitions of spirituality as well as measurement issues that concern the ways in which this construct is operationalized” (p. 59). Dent, Higgins, and Wharff discovered that due to the unique nature of spirituality, it becomes difficult to express because every individual has a different perception of what this intangible and highly personal construct embodies. Therefore, since the elements of spiritual leadership, spirituality and leadership are virtually impossible to define with any certainty, the task of categorizing spiritual leadership becomes a

potential quagmire. Thus, scholars are correct in their conclusion that spiritual leadership is multifarious and should be undertaken with the greatest of care. Wellman, Perkins and Wellman (2009), however, acknowledged that spiritual leadership is a promising form of leadership that should be enacted within the educational enterprise regardless of its poorly-defined characteristics. In keeping with this recent assessment, I believe that spiritual leadership is a much-needed practice for school superintendents in the 21st century.

It is for this very reason that spiritual leadership must be captured in action. For this form of leadership to be validated, evidence from the field is essential. Superintendents who practice spiritual leadership must share their experiences and elaborate upon the impact of spirituality on their leadership practices. Such information will help to provide a more universal definition of the presently intangible concept of spirituality, thereby enabling researchers to understand how spiritual leadership is enacted among practitioners. Shields (2005) agreed with other researchers (e.g., Brummett (2000) and Sayani (2005)) that “Spiritualities are systems of explanation and as such offer various lenses through which people see and make sense of the world. Yet, in educational contexts, spirituality is rarely thought of as a legitimate epistemology” (p. 610). If the concept is systematically addressed, researchers will be able expand their qualitative and quantitative research efforts with the goal of developing a more widely-accepted operational definition of spirituality. Consequently, this would allow scholars to work from similar frameworks as they delve into the arena of spiritual leadership, thus legitimizing spiritual leadership as a viable leadership practice.

The issues surrounding spiritual leadership warrant concentrated exploration. Thus, the perspectives of African American female superintendents were expected to create additional insights regarding spirituality and the impact of this elusive phenomenon on their leadership

practices. Studying this group could provide information that could be applied to the leadership practices of African Americans, African American females, female superintendents, male superintendents, and superintendents of other nationalities. Research must continue to seek congruency in the definition of spirituality, leadership, and spiritual leadership if current and future leaders will be able to advance this social scientific approach to leadership.

Leadership in the future will be about the creation and maintenance of relationships: the relationships of children to learning, children to children, children to adults, adults to adults, and school to community. The increasing complexity of our society, the deterioration of families, and the loss of social capital available to support children and families mean that superintendents must be adept at creating a web of support around children and their families. (Houston, 2001, p. 431)

The responsibilities placed upon the shoulders of current superintendents require them to perform in a manner that is almost superhuman as they strive to meet seemingly impossible expectations. Houston (2001), for example, reaffirmed this notion when he asserted that society wants superintendents to be omnipotent and omniscient beings, even though they serve in an environment that is multifarious in nature. These are impossible expectations to be placed on any human, yet they exist. Therefore, it is not surprising to see spirituality enter the discourse regarding education and leadership practices (Wheatley, 2002). In times of chaos, people often look toward spirituality for answers to questions that seem to be unanswerable. This is the time to expand the literature regarding spirituality and its impact on the leadership practices of superintendents. Indeed, the state of leadership in education warrants this paradigm shift.

Spirituality is an integral component of the governing practices of leaders in various organizations, including the educational enterprise. Spiritual leadership is a leadership style that

is gaining more acceptance as society continues to experience a heightened level of insecurity and uncertainty.

Superintendents work in environments that can become politically charged and psychically dangerous. Staying open-hearted and steadily focused on a higher purpose in such circumstances requires the inner strength that results from spiritual practice.

Engaging in such practices is not likely to eliminate all stress or prevent political turmoil. But it can help leaders be sources of stability and clarity when chaos and confusion seek to stall progress and lower hopes. Spiritual leadership is indispensable. (Thompson, 2005, p. 26)

Many leaders are utilizing this form of leadership, whether consciously or unconsciously, to make decisions that affect the lives and well being of those they lead. This is true in many organizations, especially for those who lead our public school systems. “The superintendency isn’t so much a job as it is a calling. You may choose it, but it also chooses you. You are summoned to it” (Houston, 2001, p. 433). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which superintendents describe their leadership style as spiritual.

Justification of Selected Research Questions

As noted earlier, spiritual leadership has been practiced since the dawn of recorded history, which is why many in both the business and educational arenas have embraced the concept and have used it with marked success. As discussed, however, those who accept this practice have yet to concur with respect to an accepted definition of this leadership style. It was evident, therefore, that there was a need to expand the literature on spiritual leadership to gain an enhanced understanding of the elusive constructs of spirituality and spiritual leadership. Thus, this study’s goals were justified and will contribute to the literature in ways I have already

addressed. The perspectives of African American female superintendents will contribute to this field of study by lending their perspectives regarding these constructs. Due to lack of research purporting spiritual leadership to be a formidable and effective practice in the educational field, it was imperative that answers to questions surrounding the concept of spiritual leadership receive attention from various viewpoints. This study, therefore, sought to answer the following research questions:

- Do African American female superintendents in Virginia describe their leadership style as spiritual?
- If they do, how do the perspectives and actions of these women contribute to our understanding of spirituality in a leadership context?
- How do African American female superintendents define and enact spiritual leadership in regards to their daily leadership practices?

It was anticipated that answers to these questions would provide information that would assist in determining how spiritual leadership served as a formidable leadership style for these women, as well as lend support to the notion that spiritual leadership can be embraced as a leadership style for the 21st century public school superintendent. It was also expected that the perspectives of these women might lend valuable insights about the nature of spiritual leadership, which could in turn enable greater clarity with respect to implementation efforts. In short, a clear understanding of spiritual leadership is essential if it is to be considered a laudable practice in the field of education. It is imperative that leaders be able to articulate and reach some consensus regarding the nature of the phenomenon of spiritual leadership.

As answers to these and related questions are sought and acquired, scholarship in the field of spiritual leadership will become more rigorous. Clarification is integral to the evolution

and formation of a leadership style that is still in its infancy. As the body of literature flourishes, proponents of this theory will begin to validate the claims of the effectiveness of this distinctive form of leadership.

Justification of the Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which superintendents described their leadership styles with respect to the influence of spirituality, as well as why they purported their chosen form of leadership to be effective. Qualitative research methodologies have overwhelmingly been the method of choice among scholars who examine spiritual leadership, (Franklin, 2009; Hooper-Atlas, 2002; Issacson, 2001; Lyon, 2004; Quinnine, 2007; Rezach, 2002; Smith, 2007; Thankappan, 2005), which is why a qualitative design was used in the present study. As discussed, there is limited research regarding spiritual leadership—and even fewer reports that integrate spiritual leadership with the field of education. Therefore, a phenomenological design was determined to be optimal for obtaining the rich information that is needed to promote the growth in literature regarding spiritual leadership (McMillan & Schmacher, 2006).

This study explored the concept of spiritual leadership through the experiences of African American female superintendents; therefore, purposeful sampling was utilized in this study. Sampling by case type is most beneficial since it enables a researcher to access the beliefs, knowledge, and experiences of a particular group who have relevant information to share. Since (1) these women all professed to practice a leadership style influenced by spirituality, and (2) it is a concept that is currently being developed, concept/theory based sampling was used in this study (McMillan & Schmacher, 2006).

Five African American female superintendents heading school divisions in Virginia agreed to participate in this study. A series of three phenomenological interviews were conducted with the five superintendents, each of whom was willing to discuss the impact of spirituality in regards to their decision-making processes. “Phenomenological studies investigate what was experienced, how it was experienced, and finally the meanings that the interviewees assign to the experience” (McMillan & Schmacher, 2006, p. 352). Scholars have employed various approaches to discover viable information pertaining to spirituality and spiritual leadership. However, researchers have agreed that the phenomenological approach is an appropriate methodology for gaining a richer understanding of the phenomenon known as spiritual leadership (Issacson, 2001; Quinnine, 2007). Therefore, open-ended interviews were used in this study. In order to enhance validity, the interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed verbatim. Once an interview was transcribed, each participant was allowed to review their transcription in order to check it for accuracy (McMillan & Schmacher). Later, when Chapter 4 was completed, each superintendent also reviewed that chapter for accuracy regarding theme development.

A more detailed description of the methodology that was used to research spirituality and its impact on the leadership practices of African American female superintendents is featured in Chapter 3. This section also provides information regarding the research design, sampling procedure, data collection and resulting analysis process.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter fully describes the study's design, the methodology, the sampling process for obtaining participants, procedures for data collection and analysis, and the delimitations of the study.

Type of Study

As discussed, the vast majority of studies regarding spiritual leadership have been qualitative in nature (Franklin, 2009; Hooper-Atlas, 2002; Issacson, 2001; Lyon, 2004; Quinnine, 2007; Rezach, 2002; Smith, 2007; Thankappan, 2005). Given the limited research regarding spiritual leadership—as well as the paucity of reports that investigate how spiritual leadership has been implemented in the field of education—this study used a phenomenological approach to study spirituality and its impact on the leadership practices of African American women in the field of education who embrace spiritual leadership. Creswell (2007) advocated the use of a phenomenological approach in cases when a researcher wished to depict the essence of a phenomenon by analyzing the perceptions of those who experience the phenomenon first-hand.

Use of a Phenomenological Research Design

Scholars have employed various approaches to discover viable information pertaining to spirituality and spiritual leadership. Researchers have agreed that the phenomenological approach is an appropriate methodology for assessing and understanding phenomenon of such complexity (Issacson, 2001; Quinnine, 2007). Therefore, a phenomenological research design was used to examine the perceptions of five African American female superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia regarding spirituality and how they felt it impacted their leadership

practices. This design was chosen because a phenomenological methodology is ideal for gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of a select group of persons regarding a particular phenomenon. “Phenomenological researchers generally agree that our central concern is to return to embodied, experiential meanings. We aim for fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p. 6). Because the phenomenon under scrutiny was spiritual leadership in an academic setting, participants were expected to willingly share their experiences with spiritual leadership by extrapolating aspects of spirituality that significantly influenced their decision making and leadership processes in a public school setting. In other words, this study attempted to disclose how spiritual leadership was integrated into the daily leadership practices of this population.

A phenomenological study requires a specific method for analyzing collected data. This methodology makes use of the themes that emerge to arrive at textural and structural meanings of the phenomenon in order to uncover the essence of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. The research questions, therefore, are the driving force behind the analysis of the participants’ statements, the cluster formations and the development of themes.

Research Questions

As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature revealed a need to further develop the dual constructs of spirituality and spiritual leadership. Several practitioners in the field of education profess to be spiritual leaders and lend support to the notion that spirituality and leadership should not be ignored in education. Research must continue to seek a more profound understanding of spiritual leadership in an effort to enhance and validate the effectiveness of this leadership practice in education. Hence, this study addressed the following research questions in an effort to expand the literature in the field regarding spirituality and leadership.

1. Do African American female superintendents in Virginia describe their leadership style as spiritual?
2. If they do, how do the perspectives and actions of these women contribute to our understanding of spirituality in a leadership context?
3. How do African American female superintendents define and enact spiritual leadership in regards to their daily leadership practices?

Protocol Development

Prior to undertaking this research, I thoroughly reviewed the existing literature on spirituality and spiritual leadership, which assisted in developing the interview protocol (Hooper-Atlas, 2002; Rezach, 2002; Smith, 2007; Thankappan, 2005). An interview guide incorporated semi-structured interview questions that focused on the three domains that were derived from the research questions used in the study. These domains included 1) descriptors of spiritual leadership, 2) spirituality's impact on leadership practices, and 3) spiritual leadership's impact on decision-making processes. As developed from the literature in this area, the interviews employed in this study were designed to solicit information regarding the three research questions, as well as provide basic demographic information, such as educational background, years of experience as leaders of public school divisions, and the number and location of school divisions in which they served. The interview questions were developed from questions previously used in various qualitative studies designed to capture similar information to be gathered by this study (Bonner, 2007; Hooper-Atlas, 2002; Rezach, 2002; Smith, 2007; Thankappan, 2005).

Although a pilot test was initially planned as a component of this study, a proposed sampling of African American female superintendents from neighboring states (i.e., non-

participants) was unable to participate in the pilot study in order to further enhance the viability and clarity of the interview protocol for the main study. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), “A pilot test is necessary as a check for bias in the procedures, the interviewer, and the questions” (p. 204). Although non-participating African American female superintendents did not engage in the validation process regarding the interview protocol, the methodologist approved the final interview protocols for utilization in this study.

Summary of the Methodology

Table 1 summarizes the methodology that was utilized to explore the following three research questions:

Question One (*Do African American female superintendents in Virginia describe their leadership style as spiritual?*) focuses more succinctly on perceptions. Thus, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to provide the necessary information to adequately address this topic. Question Two (*If they do, how do the perspectives and actions of these women contribute to our understanding of spirituality in a leadership context?*) and Question Three (*How do African American female superintendents define and enact spiritual leadership in regards to their daily leadership practices?*) were examined in two ways: (1) through informal observation, and (2) interpretation of the actions of these female leaders in their role as superintendent.

Table 1: Summary of Methodology

Research Questions	Data Source	Data Analysis
1. Do African American female superintendents in Virginia describe their leadership style as spiritual?	Perceptions of the sample deduced from multiple semi-structured interview questions	*Verbatim recordings of the participants' responses. *Discovering reoccurring themes by way of a coding process.
2. If they do, how do the perspectives and actions of these women contribute to our understanding of spirituality in a leadership context?	Perceptions of the sample deduced from multiple semi-structured interview questions	*Verbatim recordings of the participants' responses. *Discovering reoccurring themes by way of a coding process.
3. How do African American female superintendents define and enact spiritual leadership in regards to their daily leadership practices?	Perceptions of the sample deduced from multiple semi-structured interview questions	*Verbatim recordings of the participants' responses. * Discovering reoccurring themes by way of a coding process.

Selection of Participants

The inherent nature of the study relied on identifying participants who were willing to discuss the role of spirituality in their daily leadership practices. Since this study explores spiritual leadership through the experiences of African American female superintendents, purposeful sampling was utilized. Sampling by case type is advantageous since it enables a researcher to access the beliefs, knowledge, and experiences of a particular group who have relevant information to impart. Moreover, since these women agreed to openly discuss spiritual leadership and its role in their daily decision-making processes—a construct that is in need of

further development—concept/theory based sampling was undertaken in this study (McMillan & Schmacher, 2006).

In terms of adequate sample size, Creswell (2007) asserted that 5 to 25 participants would be sufficient for conducting a phenomenological study. Therefore, the participation of five African American female superintendents met that size recommendation. Participants were selected based on the likelihood that they would describe their leadership style as spiritual. However, this study also limited participant selection to being female and African American, as discussed in Chapter 2. To reiterate, one rationale for delimiting the study in this way stems in part from Sernak (2004), who asserted that “Not to discuss spirituality in a study of African American women leaders is to eliminate the thread that runs throughout all aspects of their lives” (p.87). Moreover, the struggles and experiences of African American women as a population that has been marginalized by both race and gender has resulted in the development of generations of women who freely proclaim to be grounded in the spiritual.

To begin the process of identifying participants, I requested a complete listing of the African American superintendents in charge of public schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia from the Virginia Department of Education. Although the list included the names of 36 female superintendents in Virginia, it did not differentiate their identity by race. From prior knowledge, however, I knew that four of these individuals were of African American decent. When contacted, they graciously provided a comprehensive listing of the all the African American female superintendents who were heading up Virginia school divisions, five of whom were solicited for participation according to the protocol described in the following paragraph.

I asked the five selected African American female superintendents in Virginia to participate in this study by way of a formal letter outlining the focus of the study, a full

description of how the study would be conducted and analyzed, as well as the general expectations for participation (Appendix A). I followed up this letter with an email and a telephone call to answer any questions that the potential participants had in reference to the study and their responsibilities. After any questions or concerns were fully addressed, I obtained written consent from the participants to indicate their voluntary participation in the study (Appendix C).

To further enhance the ethical design of this study, I endeavored to promote the anonymity of the participants selected for this study. Kvale (1996) stressed the importance of addressing ethical issues in the design process of an interview protocol. It was imperative, therefore, to create an environment where participants were assured of complete confidentiality, and that they would be made abreast of all possible consequences that could arise from their contributions to this research. Section One of the Interview Guide addressed the purpose of the interview and ensured the participants of full anonymity (see Appendix B).

Description of Participants

The superintendents ranged in age from 48 to 61, with most of them at the upper end of that age spectrum. Four of the five participants in the study had five or fewer years experience as superintendent in their school divisions (each at only a single institution at the time of the interviews). They led school divisions ranging in size of student population from approximately 890 to 24,000 pre-kindergarten through grade-twelve students. Without exception, since assuming their current position they had significantly increased the on-time graduation rate of the students in their division. In fact, two of the three high schools under their supervision had attained the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) designation as measured by the federal government, which indicates their on-time graduation rates met or exceeded an 80% pass rate.

Moreover, they all proudly announced that the Virginia Department of Education had fully accredited 100% of the schools under the supervision.

Each superintendent was reared in a two-parent home where the value of education was instilled in them at a very early age—even though three of the five mothers of these women had not completed high school. Four of the five superintendents hailed from families where their parents reared five or more children. In every case the father worked diligently to provide for the family; therefore, the fathers were similarly unable to attain a high school diploma. They all reminisced and spoke of their childhood experiences with a special emphasis on how their parents impressed upon them that an education would lead to a better life. In fact, one of the superintendents quoted Nelson Mandela to sum up her parents' view of the effect of an education: "Education is the most powerful weapon you could use to change the world."

Procedures

Data Collection

I conducted all aspects of the interview process, beginning with the design of a semi-structured interview that would address the components of each research question. This step supported the work of Creswell (2007), who advocated that researchers who use a qualitative research design should also create their own interview protocol. Five African American female superintendents were interviewed between the months of October and December, 2010. Each superintendent participated in three separate interviews ranging in length from thirty minutes to almost two hours. The utilization of three interviews for each participant was recommended in order to gain rich information regarding the topic studied in a phenomenological study. Creswell

(2007) encouraged the usage of multiple interviews in order to conduct a phenomenological study (p. 61).

Each of the three face-to-face interviews occurred in the field with each superintendent, with the exception of one participant who participated in her third interview via telephone. Each interview was scheduled at the convenience of the superintendents. The initial interview began with soliciting demographic information regarding the school division where the superintendent was employed, along with personal information pertaining to their childhood experiences with the intent to discover successes and revelations experienced by these women as leaders.

The second interview was designed to solicit specific information that focused on the phenomenon of spiritual leadership and how they described the impact of spirituality on their leadership practices. The final interview was intended to uncover any information that participants determined they had neglected to include previously; it also provided an opportunity for them to elaborate on other aspects of their leadership practices they thought would be valuable to the study. Without exception, the superintendents responded to each of the interview questions with careful thought. They spoke openly of stories and experiences that resulted in a myriad of lessons learned that they believed helped to shape their leadership practices. In particular, they each offered insightful definitions/descriptions of the abstract concepts of spirituality and spiritual leadership.

Data Analysis

The interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed verbatim, after which a process of coding for themes and patterns was conducted. The transcripts were read numerous times and important individual statements relating to spirituality, leadership, and spirituality were identified and sorted into distinct clusters. Each cluster was further analyzed and prescribed

meanings that captured the spirit of the statements that were embedded within a particular cluster. These meanings that were attributed to each of the clusters were further analyzed to discover overarching themes that would address the research questions put forth in this study.

I conducted all aspects of the interview process. Cross-referencing of the information derived from the interviews—more specifically, creating clusters, assigning meanings to clusters and arriving at overarching themes—provided essential knowledge regarding any perceptions and practices that were common among the leaders. Creswell (2007) summarized the process in this way:

The researcher develops a textural description of the experience of the person (what participants experienced), a structural description of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context), and a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience. (p. 60)

The coding categories that were developed were carefully defined to enhance clarity. The coding process was fluid and evolved throughout the interview process. After the final interview, all data was synthesized and the coding process was refined.

Reliability & Validity

Researchers typically use a variety of strategies to enhance reliability and validity, including incorporating participants' post-review transcripts (Creswell, 2007). As noted, three interviews were employed over the course of the study. The 15 resulting interviews (3 interviews for each of the 5 participants) were transcribed verbatim, and hand-delivered to each participant in order to provide each participant with the opportunity to review the transcriptions for accuracy.

As suggested by McMillan & Schumacher (2006), there are ten ways to improve the validity of a qualitative study. Table 2 is provided to demonstrate how this study incorporated nine of those ten strategies into the research design. (I did not employ the “Participant Researcher” strategy, which asks participants to keep anecdotal notes during the study period. Thus, this step is not reflected in Table 2.)

Table 2: Summary of Enhancing Design Validity

Strategy	This Study
Prolonged and persistent field work	Research was conducted over a three-month period in the field (school division)
Multi-method strategies	Multiple in-depth interviews were incorporated
Participant language; verbatim accounts	Participant accounts were transcribed verbatim by the researcher
Low-inference descriptors	Observations to enhance descriptions
Multiple researchers	Only one researcher was used in this study
Mechanically recorded data	Interviews were tape-recorded to increase accuracy
Member checking	Probing ensued a more in-depth understanding
Participant review	The participants were asked to review the transcripts and findings
Negative or discrepant data	Negative cases and outlying information would have been reported; however none was found

Source: McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 324

Eliminating Bias

A phenomenological study requires that the researcher identify any bias that may exist before a study is designed and undertaken so that findings are accurate and free of biased interpretation. This process of uncovering possible bias at the onset of a phenomenological study is called bracketing (Creswell, 2007). I am an African American woman who serves in a leadership capacity in a K-12 public educational setting. I profess to be a leader who practices the intangible and often ambiguous form of leadership known as spiritual leadership. In other words, I attribute my professional success to my devout and unwavering belief in a higher power who serves as my sustainer. Despite my similarity to the study's five-member cohort, I was at all times conscious of the possibility of bias in data collection and analysis.

Limitations

At the time this study was conducted, there were five African American female superintendents practicing in the Commonwealth of Virginia who agreed to serve as this study's participants, which represents a relatively small sample size. This limitation means that this study may not be generalizable to all superintendents practicing in Virginia or elsewhere. However, due to the small percentage of African American women who lead school divisions nationally, it may be generalizable to that specific population of educational leaders who profess to be a practitioner of spiritual leadership.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Definition of Clusters

This phenomenological study was designed to explore the following research questions: (1) Do African American female superintendents in Virginia describe their leadership styles as being of a spiritual nature; (2) if they do, how do the perspectives and actions of these women contribute to our understanding of spirituality in a leadership context; and (3) how do African American female superintendents define and enact spiritual leadership in regards to their daily leadership practices. Using 15 semi-structured interviews—representing the views of 5 African American female superintendents practicing in the Commonwealth of Virginia—this qualitative analysis generated a total of 217 transcribed pages, of which 133 individual statements were utilized for the analysis. As discussed in the “Assumptions” section of Chapter 3, I was at all times aware of the need to remove all personal bias from this study by objectively interpreting the information that these five women shared during their interviews.

To begin the analysis, I read and re-read transcripts of the interviews to identify patterns and themes. As patterns began to emerge, I identified 133 statements related to my research questions. I then assigned each participant a unique color which was used to color-code their interview transcripts. The color-coded statements from each of the superintendents were then separated according to commonalities, which were later designated as clusters. Only the clusters that were comprised of responses by a majority of participants were included as findings that would later result in the development of the two themes discussed herein. One exception was made with respect to one of the clusters that was included in the compilation of the themes; although two superintendents (40%) spoke directly to a particular issue, the remaining women who alluded to the issue requested that their comments remain off the record. Nonetheless, I

concluded that this information was sufficiently important and should be referenced in the study, despite a level of reluctance among several of the superintendents in discussing the issue.

As shown in Table 3, this analysis resulted in the formulation of 12 clusters, which are associated with the superintendent who conveyed that information according to a 2-letter identity code (e.g., Superintendent A, SA; Superintendent B, SB; and so on). These superintendents were able to clearly articulate and elaborate upon the meaning of spiritual leadership and spirituality as reflected in the following clusters: 1) Experiencing Race and Gender Discrimination, 2) Recognizing Separation of Church and State, 3) Striving to “Do the Right Thing,” 4) Relying on Spiritual Foundation for Strength and Sound Decision-Making, 5) Enhancing Spiritual Growth via the Examples of Others, 6) Realization of Identity-Belonging to God, 7) Assigning Purpose to Position, 8) Ascribing to Rituals and Spiritual Routines, 9) Believing in Divine Intervention, 10) Utilization of Prayer for Protection and Guidance, 11) Leading Spiritually, and 12) Growing Spiritually with Wisdom. This table also includes a percentage breakdown of how frequently these cluster topics were clearly identified in the interviews with the superintendents. As shown, only one cluster (Experiencing Race and Gender Discrimination) was directly stated with less than 60% frequency across interviews.

Table 3: 12 Clusters Obtained from Horizontalization

Formulated Cluster	Contributors to the Formation of the Cluster	% of Direct Statements
Experiencing Race and Gender Discrimination	SA, SC	40%
Recognizing Separation of Church and State	SB,SC, SD	60%
Striving to “Do the Right Thing”	SA,SC,SD	60%
Relying on Spiritual Foundation for Strength & Sound Decision-Making	SA, SB,SC,SD, SE	100%
Enhancing Spiritual Growth via the Examples of Others	SC,SD,SE	60%
Realization of Identity- Belonging to God	SB, SC, SD	60%
Assigning Purpose to Position	SA,SB,SC,SD,SE	100%
Ascribing to Rituals and Spiritual Routines	SA,AB,AC,AD,SE	100%
Believing in Divine Intervention	SA,SB,SC,SD	80%
Utilization of Prayer for Protection and Guidance	SA, SC,SD,SE	80%
Leading Spiritually	SA,SB,SC, SD,SE	100%
Growing Spiritually with Wisdom	SA,SB, SC,SD, SE	100%

After identifying the 12 clusters, I then grouped them into 2 themes that represented their spiritual belief system and what it meant to lead from a spiritual center:

1. Theme 1: The Spiritual Belief System and the Relationship with a Higher Power (Spirituality)
2. Theme 2: Power and Practices

Table 4 represents the themes and their ascribed meanings as compiled from the lived experiences of these practicing superintendents.

Table 4: Themes with Ascribed Meanings

Theme	Ascribed Meaning
Theme 1: The Spiritual Belief System and the Relationship with a Higher Power	<p>This theme addresses the spiritual belief system of the superintendents who proclaim to believe in a higher power—God or Christ. None of the superintendents mentioned any other higher powers. This theme encompasses ideas put forth by the participants that speak to doing the right thing, realizing to whom they belong as it relates to God, understanding their purpose in this leadership capacity, and perhaps most noteworthy, an overwhelming consensus regarding the belief in divine intervention.</p>
Theme 2: Power and Practices	<p>This theme reflects the story of what it means to be a leader who leads from a spiritual center. This theme includes the challenges, the realities, and the rewards of leading spiritually. It also incorporates ideas that were extrapolated from clusters that addressed racial and gender discrimination, the separation of church and state, the reliance on spiritual foundation for strength, wisdom, protection, guidance and sound decision making, and the desire to grow spiritually through prayer, the emulation of others, and the integration of rituals and routines in both the private sphere and public sphere of their lives.</p>

Theme 1: The Spiritual Belief System and the Relationship with a Higher Power

Theme 1 addresses the characteristics of the participants' spiritual belief system and their relationship with God according to how they conceptualized the abstract concept of spirituality and used it in their decision-making process (see Figure 1). The superintendents describe their spiritual belief systems in four ways: divine intervention, belonging to God, the quest to do what is right, and embracing the notion of assigning purpose to service.

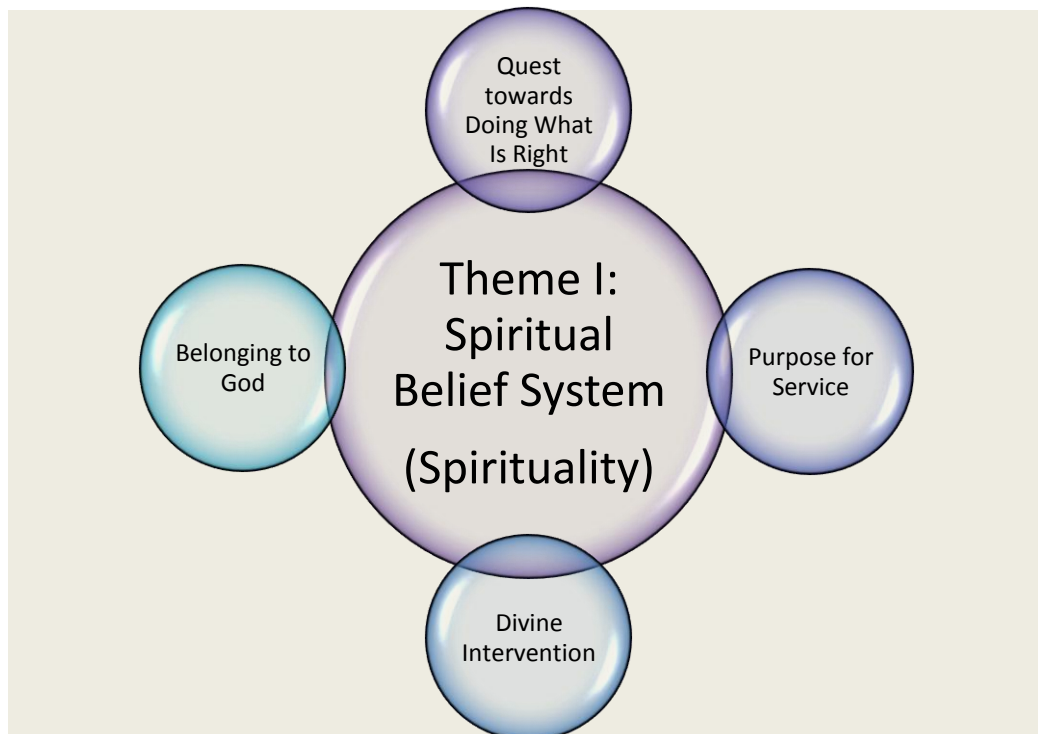


Figure 1: The Impact of the Spiritual Belief System and the Relationship with a Higher Power and the Decision-Making Process.

Divine Intervention

The superintendents often spoke of the concept of divine intervention and believed that it was destined by God for them to hold the position of superintendent. In short, they were

practicing their craft because God had intervened and allowed them to rise to their current position despite the many obstacles that were set before them. As one superintendent stated:

So I really didn't know that I was going to be a teacher. I guess it was my fate and it was a plan that was developed for me. This is about spiritualism and by God I just walked with it.

Another superintendent echoed a similar sentiment:

Then I got a call asking me if I would consider coming to another school division to take on an assistant superintendent position. After much prayer, my husband and I decided it would be the right thing to do and I did. I accepted the position and moved to that area. I had not mapped the journey. That's for sure!

The participants shared a strong belief that they had not attained the position of superintendent solely through their actions. Another superintendent continued in a similar vein,

I believe that I'm here because God brought me here. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't be here and that's what I believe... I just know in my heart that the only reason I'm here is due to Him. All that I have is because of Him. Where I'm going will be between me and Him. I don't know what else to say. I just believe that it's all because of His mercy and His grace and because of His favor that I'm here. I believe that He brought me here for a reason. I believe that this job has to be done. I believe that if I stand on His promises, He will carry me through it.

One superintendent described her ascension to the highest position in PK-12 education as “part of a plan for me when I was conceived in mom's womb. I know that. So I've just stepped out on faith.” According to the statements conveyed by these women, their arrival at the doors of the superintendency was no accident—it evolved according to a divine plan.

Doing What is Right

The superintendents were able to persist to their current position because of their faith in God. They truly believed God had allowed them to break the glass ceiling—and because of this belief, they felt compelled to do what was right for the children and the school division to which they had been assigned. One woman described how spiritual leadership impacted her leadership methodologies:

Spiritual leadership is leading by understanding that you are guided by truth and honesty, and that you are led by your faith in a higher being and that being for me is God. No matter what you do, you have to maintain a sense of love, integrity and understanding. Know that everything is not going to be perfect but if you do what's right in the end it will work out.

The participants in this study uniformly agreed that the work they performed was not about them—that they had to eliminate the notion of self promotion and focus on the greater good. To achieve that goal, they understood the need to gain a greater understanding of people. As voiced by one superintendent:

I'm really very cognizant of the fact that I work with other people who have feelings so I treat people the way I want to be treated. That doesn't always happen—sometimes they treat me bad but you have to learn how to rise above it and keep walking.

It was evident in the various interviews with these dynamic leaders that they embraced the premise of treating all people right and doing the right thing. The youngest superintendent of the participants in the study stated the following:

If you start doing it the right way and things start to get murky, He's going to come in and finish it for you but you have to start it and start it the right way and He's gonna

finish it. I know if I do the right thing He's got me. We're good and we're just going to soar. We're OK.

Although the notion of “doing what is right” is highly subjective and depends on who one is and what one believes, a common thread emerged from these women's statements. It became clear that the participants in this study defined “what is right” according to the tenets of their faith. For these women, doing “what is right” emerges directly from the Holy Bible. These tenets represent the driving force that allowed these women to get closer to attaining their goal of doing what is right—not only publicly in their school settings, but also privately in other spheres of their day-to-day activities.

Throughout the interview process, the superintendents alluded to various tenets of the Bible that they used in their decision-making processes. When asked to choose a few words or phrases to describe how they led, each superintendent responded with terms that ultimately shaped their definition of “doing what is right.” Superintendent A argued that when making decisions, a leader must focus on taking action, achievement, rigor, accountability, relevance and relationship building. As she stated, “I believe a part of my job is to help provide them with supports and the necessary items and skill-development opportunities to do the job. Teaching is an extremely mystical profession.” Her definition of doing what was right was reflected in helping and serving those in her charge. This “doing right” theme was interpreted by Superintendent B as incorporating fairness, consistency, effective communication, collaboration, compassion, transparency, empowerment, and love into building the capacity of her organization. Superintendent C spoke about high expectations, vision, direction, hope, patience, compassion, team building and collaboration. Superintendent D incorporated the utilization of wisdom, effective communication, visibility, teamwork and working collaboratively to positively

impact the welfare of the whole enterprise. Superintendent E endeavored to promote integrity, incorporating what was best for the whole body, collaboration, and honesty. Many of the values alluded to by the superintendents refer directly back to the tenets of the Bible as they ultimately endeavored to do what they believed was “right.”

Identity: Who Am I?

Several of the superintendents emphasized that their spirituality was built upon the tenets of the Holy Bible, and that their beliefs governed every decision-making process. Essentially, their spirituality was as essential to their being as the blood coursing through their veins. This was verbalized by one woman who asserted the following:

My spiritual foundation and my relationship with Christ is just who I am. It would be like trying to separate that from the work that I do. It would be like trying to remove one of your arms and still be able to pick up an object. It is an operational part of my life and I cannot separate it from anything that I do. We all have to make choices and I don't put on Christ at one moment and then when I'm ready to make a decision or deal with tough situations I take off Christ and put on something else.

Another superintendent emphatically concluded the following:

I know whose I am. I know whose child I am. Bottom line is part of growing up is understanding that you can accomplish much but you don't have to let people know what you're accomplishing. Just continue to walk and show what you can do without making ... without becoming very loud with it. I have a humble spirit and so I think some people mistake that. I don't care who gets credit for the work that has to be done for our students as long as it gets done. So I don't have a problem. I know whose I am.

It was clear throughout the interviews that these women were governed by their spiritual beliefs and that they possessed a strong sense of self. They readily made decisions based on deeply-held beliefs that had been formulated over many years of witnessing the power of prayer and faith.

Standing on Purpose

The tenets of their belief system, imprinted with the teachings of the Holy Bible, have enabled these women to “stand on purpose.” This notion has resulted in their ability to take risks, to make decisions that may be unpopular or politically incorrect, and to stand for what is right in the face of adversity and daunting personal ramifications. Superintendent A recognized the peaks and valleys in her chosen profession and discovered that,

Something as minor as being able to wake up this morning, and that’s not minor that’s a major factor, and then utilize your computation of your blessings to guide you through the tough times. Allowing yourself to be guided by the basic tenets of your beliefs, whether it’s the Bible, the Koran or whatever the basis is for your spiritual beliefs, and revert back to it in tough times.

Superintendent B embraced a similar philosophy in the face of adversity and shared the impact of her spirituality on how she was able to persevere through the tough times:

To me spirituality is understanding who Christ is, what He can do for us and the value of having Him in your life. When you have Him in your life there’s a sense of calm. There’s peace. There’s a peace the world doesn’t understand even in the midst of the most traumatic event, there is peace because you understand that it’s not your power that will affect the situation. You are secure regardless of the situation.

Superintendent C recognized the need to take risks and she was not afraid to do so. She spoke boldly about risk-taking and her ability to withstand any level of uncertainty with respect to how a particular decision would be viewed when she stated,

I have got to just believe and trust that He is going to carry me through. Then we've always heard from the business side of it sometimes you have to take a risk...got to take it! Take the risk and trust and believe He's going to see me through. It takes a lot of praying.

Her statement was very simple in nature, yet required unwavering faith in a higher power.

Superintendent D showed the same level of faith as she professed,

I am going to be truthful 100% and deal with that. It may not always be pleasant and there are some unpopular decisions that we make sometimes but if it's made based on wisdom and truth then I will always believe that God will carry me through it. So I'm OK with that.

The following statement verbalized by Superintendent E captures the essence of what the other women stated when she concluded the following about standing on purpose:

Many times you have people who are criticizing you as the leader or the district in general and there are times when you know that really the intent is to distract and destroy. In those times I try to keep my mind focused on my spiritual side and to basically, pray on it within. Whatever I do, I do it not based on the fact that people are denigrating you or anything else but whatever you say or whatever you do you, do it with the understanding that you have a strength within you to withstand whatever is thrown at you and to basically pray on what you are doing and ask for guidance.

Without exception, these women demonstrated strong faith and resolute courage. They understood that the work was not about them—rather, it was about making the best decisions for

those they served. This belief influenced how they responded to the various situations that confronted them. Regardless of the circumstance, they uniformly placed a greater emphasis on the whole rather than self. One superintendent described how she responded to challenges:

You kind of have to take a deep breath. Remember not to react immediately. Think about it and I will be honest—pray. Just pray on it. Even if you are at your desk—just pray on it. It is so easy to let an issue, especially if it catches you off guard, just all of a sudden overwhelms you and you’re reacting in a way that probably if you had thought a little bit more about it you would have handled it a little bit differently. Just taking a deep breath and trying to think about it. As I said, always pray about it. There have been times when you get bombarded and you start getting hyper and thinking ‘No, I’m not going to take this, I’m not going to do this.’ Then you have to kind of say hold on! This is not the way it is. They want you to react this way. So take a deep breath, pray on it and then move forward. And you know that your spiritual training has taught you to rely on this and go from there.

Some women spoke about how they reacted to specific times of stress, such as board meetings or other intense situations that required them to “stand on purpose.” A few described how they had to refrain from any knee-jerk reactions, preferring to hold fast to tenets of the Holy Bible to guide them. Superintendents C and D each described how they dealt with issues having to do with the school board. Superintendent C declared that,

God brought me here. I’ve had some board members that try to turn the tides up. That’s fine. Now I’m just nice -- Praise the Lord for His mercy endureth forever. I say it 50 times before I go into a meeting. I don’t worry about it. If you want to be nasty—guess

what: you're the only one looking nasty. I just smile like OK we'll take care of it, we'll look into it, and we'll report back to you.

And superintendent D followed with,

I am at my best as a professional and I'm totally relaxed, but I've prayed all the way going up the steps. I'm not afraid to speak up and I'm not afraid to say I need to do a little bit more research and I'll get back to you. I don't need to be confrontational—which some people are. As I said, I don't have to claim I know it all. But I will tell people that's what an education does for you. It tells you how to get the right answers and to get back with people.

It became clear from the interviews that the faith-based behaviors these superintendents described had contributed to their survival and success. Their spiritual base enabled them to be strong enough to resist the temptation to respond imprudently under adversarial conditions, as well as to comprehend that their job demanded them to stay on purpose and refrain from internalizing and personalizing any attacks. In essence, they had internalized the Bible tenet to “turn the other cheek.” This response became easier with the realization that their purpose for serving was continually being guided by a higher power to which they turned to for guidance.

It should be stressed that when speaking of her spirituality, each woman shared a somewhat different definition; however, their definitions essentially encompassed similar tenets. Superintendent E provided a description that was echoed in a similar way by the other participants when she proclaimed the following:

My definition of spirituality is having an inner spirit that you know is from a higher authority that genuinely loves you and guides you and will help you through whatever it is. You have to understand that God's time is not your time and you cannot rush whatever

it is for you but He won't fail you. A lot of people bicker about what's in the Bible what's not in the Bible what God is and what God isn't. I don't like to spend a lot of time doing that. It's in you. God has placed His spirit in you. And if you rely on that then you will be fine. I don't spend a lot of time talking about religion because religion is anything you want to make it and if you worry about Baptist, Catholic...whatever...then you really have a problem. If there's one God, then you have to accept it—that there's one God. People may put names on it but you have to understand it's in you.

Another superintendent presented the following description of spirituality, which was similarly stated by the other women in the study:

Spirituality is my belief, my walk, my talk. I don't know how to put it in words. It's not something that you can see. It's not something that I can touch but it's something that I can feel. And I know it's there.

Because they knew it was there, they ultimately acknowledged that their knowing came from “The thing that works in you. It's almost like what's in you that flows out.” Each African American female superintendent practicing in Virginia that took part in this study agreed that the phenomenon of spirituality was experienced within the depth of her soul.

Theme 2: Power and Practices

Theme 2 delineates more precisely how spirituality impacted the leadership practices of the five superintendents interviewed for this study. Theme 2 encompasses prevalent beliefs emanating from the clusters that speak to what it means to lead from a spiritual center. This theme was formulated by way of discoveries and practices encapsulated in the various clusters (see Figure 2). These discoveries included how the impressions of others contributed to their spiritual growth (Discovery I), and the recognition of the importance of balancing the separation

of church and state even as they led from a spiritual core (Discovery II). Their practices included integrating rituals and routines into their lives as they utilized prayer for protection and guidance (Practice I), and relying on a spiritual foundation for strength and wisdom (Practice II). In general, the superintendents conveyed the power of faith and prayer as they spoke of spirituality and its impact on their leadership practices and decision-making processes.



Figure 2: Power and Practices

Discovery I: Influence of Others Regarding Spiritual Growth

Clearly, in their positions of power and influence, these female superintendents serve as examples for others to emulate. However, these women also spoke about the influence of others who they believe were placed in their lives to strengthen their spiritual relationship with God. One superintendent spoke of a custodian who had a significant impact on her spiritual growth with the following description, “[She] would bring me in there and make me get down on my

knees and pray with me, show me scriptures, read it and interpret it for me.” This superintendent was not only influenced by the faculty and staff with whom she interacted, but also by other individuals with a national reputation for evangelism. As she enthusiastically stated, “Yes, I read the scriptures every morning. It’s a ritual. This is daily. I do not start without Joyce Meyer, Creflo Dollar, and Kenneth Copeland every morning. I don’t start without them.” She was not alone, as several other participants in the study revealed much the same practice. Another superintendent also openly shared the following information regarding her practices and the influence of people who have impacted her spiritual growth and development:

I make it a practice to read spiritual books. I read the Bible of course but I also make it a practice to spend a lot of time reading spiritual growth books. I find them very helpful. I’ve read many of Joyce Meyers, Joel Olsteen, and I just finished one a month or so ago. It basically was dealing with learning how to look at your being and where you’re going and what things mean. He was telling you that God is the center. Of course he used quotations from the Bible to explain his points just to say life is a journey and you need to always be cognizant of the fact that if you’re going to grow you’ve got to always look to the strength of the Lord and move on.

Like others in the study, she also received spiritual guidance from coworkers, whose views she welcomed:

You get different perspectives and many times they end up being very similar to yours and so that way you’re able to deal with it and then you have staff who say we need to pray about this. Once that’s done then you just move on.

Superintendent D also described how nationally renowned speakers and authors had contributed to her spiritual growth. In particular, she noted how Steven Covey had influenced her thinking:

With Covey you begin with the end in mind. That's one of the things that your spiritual foundation allows you to do to. You know where you're going and the result you want to see. And when I think about the 10 commandments they serve as a foundation for not only first things first beginning with the end in mind but when we think about thinking win-win.

Another woman spoke about the extent to which her spirituality had been influenced by participating in a sorority. "Deltas are women who deal a lot with public service but it's a spiritual sorority and so without getting into some of the things that we do—it uplifts you and inspires you."

Among the many external influences that contributed to the spiritual growth of these women, none seemed more significant than the Holy Bible. Superintendent B strengthened this notion with the following statement:

I have many books about leadership and they prove to be useful but the book that is paramount in guiding my life and the work that I do is the book that says the Holy Bible and that's on my shelf also. So to describe spiritual leadership is to describe the commandments that are in the Bible. That the Lord says that if I follow those commandments and I can go out and list thousands of them, if I follow those commandments and the most important one is love. If I follow those then I have Him so that's spiritual leadership.

This statement was representative of how each of these women felt about the influence of the Bible in their lives. However, the permeation of spirituality from a variety of sources has allowed these women to derive a stronger sense of who they are as leaders and as individuals.

Discovery II: The Separation of Church and State

Without exception, each woman was cognizant of the fact that she had to balance her very public profession with her private convictions. In choosing to lead a public enterprise from a spiritual center, these women had to consciously avoid imposing their beliefs on those of others. In other words, their position necessitated a healthy respect for the separation of church and state. Overall, the superintendents who were interviewed were committed to holding true to their religious beliefs without infringing on the rights of others—although it did take mindful consideration of their communication practices. As voiced by one woman:

Having to express myself in terms of my spirituality requires thought within the development of the message. Understanding there are kids and parents and stakeholders of different religions, I have to make sure and be careful that I'm not inadvertently making a judgment call about beliefs.

Although they realized that the separation of church and state had to be upheld, the superintendents expressed the wish to be able to share their beliefs as a manifestation of how they lived, rather than overtly forcing others to ascribe to their beliefs. Another superintendent provided validation to this finding when she said that,

Sometimes it can be difficult. It can be difficult because there are some restrictions that laws and regulations have put on citizens. As a citizen there are some restrictions that I have in what I can discuss and how I discuss it as far as my faith is concerned. I do not hesitate in telling people that I love Christ. I'm not teaching them... Maybe by my behavior I'm teaching someone but I'm not trying to teach someone my religion. What I'm doing is acknowledging what I believe and I have a right to do that. I don't find it to be a conflict.

First and foremost, these women were uniformly aware of their principal roll in the public school education setting, regardless of their private beliefs: “We’re here for these children. I’m here for the citizens of this community. We’re here to do a job. We’re not here to get into your political beliefs or your personal beliefs. We’re here to do a job.” This conviction was stated by one superintendent. The other women also elaborated on this notion of doing their jobs while still adhering to personal guiding beliefs. Superintendent D put it this way: “Yes, but not so that it’s overt for the community or for my coworkers. But I walk in it every day. I pray that God’s spirit will dwell in me so that people will see His spirit—all of it and none of me as I do this, this, and this.” The fifth responder eloquently articulated the following opinion about not letting her beliefs interfere with her professional responsibilities:

Let me say first, I consider myself a spiritual person. I have a basic belief in a higher power, God; and therefore, whenever I’m making a decision, whatever I’m trying to do in my work place, and then ultimately I am trying to do what is right. What I think is approved spiritually. Certainly I do not make a display of my spiritual belief in terms of dictating to people about religion or spirituality but my inner being certainly relies on a spiritual base.

In conclusion, each of these women believed in living her life and making decisions that demonstrated full awareness of her accountability to coworkers, students, parents, and stakeholders—while at the same time holding herself accountable to a higher power. It was evident to me that these superintendents believed they were able to embrace their spiritual beliefs while carrying out the responsibilities of the position without infringing on the rights of those they served.

Practice I: Rituals and Routines-Utilization of Prayer for Protection & Guidance

Each superintendent practiced daily spiritual routines and rituals that she felt allowed her to execute her professional responsibilities more capably. One superintendent described her daily routine as follows:

I start out every morning reading the bible and getting myself at peace with God. Every day there is an adversarial situation that comes my way helping me to understand that some people are just evil and for me to keep my poise and my head at all times.

Basically through prayer, I ask for guidance, patience, and confidence to have God show me the way in spite of my enemies and that's my overall prayer all the time. You get very close to God. We have very intimate relationship. And if you didn't know how to pray, on getting this job you pretty much learn how very quickly.

The recognition of the power of prayer was also evidenced by another participant as she described certain daily routines and rituals that enhanced her spiritual growth:

One of the things I do is pray daily on my way to work. My car is my closet. I just pray and then I step out. I know and I truly believe that God protects me. He does. Every day He's got an angel that walks in front of me like a leading lamb and then there's another one with all the armor and he's covering me from my back. So I'm OK.

Another superintendent spoke not only to prayer, but also to meditation:

During the day, I meditate on the word and I'm not saying that I go to a separate place and I spend five minutes, ten minutes concentrating on the word of the Lord, but because I spend time reading and studying God's word, that's what I think about when I'm making a decision.

Every woman also read and repeated meaningful scriptures, either in their mind or verbally. One superintendent identified a specific scripture that helped to guide her:

One of the scriptures that I read, if I don't get to it every day, at some point during the day, I'm going to say a portion or a part or I'm going to think about this scripture: Second Chronicles 20th Chapter verses 1-25. So many times before a meeting, probably 99% of the time, before a meeting I'm going to say it out loud—Praise the Lord for His mercy endureth forever. Then I know I'm covered.

These exercises in spiritual growth appeared to strengthen their convictions, as well as made it possible for them to use their spirituality to face challenges in the professional realm.

Practice II: Reliance on Spiritual Foundation for Strength and Wisdom

Experiences Regarding Discrimination

Each of the superintendents in this study drew strength and wisdom from their reliance on their spiritual foundations. For example, two of the five superintendents shared concrete examples of their experiences with racial and/or gender discrimination, while others alluded to undercurrents of both. In short, four of five spoke directly or indirectly about the challenges of being treated differently and having to rely on spiritual strength to deal with any inequities. As Superintendent A stated, “This job is tough enough but I would hazard to say that it is tougher for women than it is for men and that's a given. Having a strong spiritual base keeps me coming to work”. Although all five superintendents lamented that discriminatory practices persisted, they spoke about having to rise above them for the benefit and welfare of all persons in their employ, but especially the children—regardless of their race, creed, or gender. One of the women emphatically elaborated on this notion when she said,

I have to take care of all children; they're all my kids—all of them. I'm not going to say this group come on or come on I'm going to deal with you all and let you all figure it out for yourselves. God brought me to the realization that, hey, you have to work with everybody to get where you're going. You have to work with everyone.

In particular, the superintendents who spoke openly about the discrimination they had experienced described how their spirituality helped them to rise above it and stay focused and on purpose. These leaders appeared to gain a powerful understanding from those negative experiences that they were using positively in their role as superintendents.

Decision-Making

One important arena where their reliance on spiritual leadership has significantly impacted these women pertains to their decision-making processes. Superintendent A led the discussion when she declared “I think it [spiritual leadership] means being guided in your decision making by the tenets of whatever you respect as a higher power. Walking the walk. Being true to yourself and to your God. That's what I think.” Superintendent B rendered a similar variation of this theme:

I think about decisions that I make—Am I going to be giving love in this process? Am I going to be effecting someone else's life and am I adding value to their life by giving them love, by making a decision that is rooted in love and that's grounded in love?

Superintendent C contributed to the discussion through her views about purpose-based decision making:

Do your job but at the same time believe and trust and love... If you think about why we are here on this earth. What did God do? What did Jesus do? He did things for other

people. He blessed others. That's all he did. That's all he did. That's what we're supposed to do.

Superintendent D described how spiritual leadership functioned in her life:

Belief, serenity, wisdom and truth—that is how I believe I lead spiritually. I believe I can do the job. But we have to be certainly patient. We have serenity, a calmness about us. There's a serenity, there's a peace that I hope that I have that influences someone else. You know as an administrator, that much of what we deal with will be in terms of emotions. It's how we respond to the emotional cry they have.

In summation, Superintendent E goes beyond the definition of spirituality and declared that “If you want to be a good leader then I think you have to have a strong spiritual base. I'm sure there are those who may not have it. But I think ultimately you've got it by higher divinity”. This statement is indicative of the feelings and beliefs of these superintendents who served as participants in this study. This belief is the crux of how the superintendents successfully lead their school divisions.

Spirituality and Leadership

As evidenced by the thoughts and experiences of the five female African-American superintendents who took part in this study, the leadership philosophies and practices that they rely on to lead their public school system in the Commonwealth of Virginia appear to be very much intertwined with a pervasive sense of spirituality. Although they have their own technical and theoretical characteristics, as practiced by these five women, their spiritual beliefs and leadership practices are very much interwoven. The phenomenon of spiritual leadership is one that is intangible; yet, there is consensus among these superintendents that spiritual leadership

represents the sum of an individual's experiences over a lifetime. As described by many of them, spiritual leadership enables them to lead with a clear understanding of purpose, as well as the tenacity to rely on religious beliefs to do what is necessary to successfully fulfill their purpose or destiny. These women expressed a clear understanding of the road they had to travel in order to do their job. As one woman stated:

It is difficult and I can't tell you how many people have told me that they pray for me every day and I readily accept it and ask them to continue because as many voices that are going up, I feel that's going to be my fence that's going to be built around me.

Despite the challenges of being a superintendent, each of these women found strength in a higher power. One woman put it this way: "It's called the oath of positivity. It's about believing in yourself and about believing in someone higher than you or I. That's what enables me; empowers me." These women all led "from within" and their spirituality and faith in God empowered them to do so. One superintendent professed,

Simply that spirituality is my guide...period...in all of my life. I think trusting and relying in my faith on God is what gives me my strength and my desire to help others. I think the main thing is if you have a spiritual base and a strong self confidence then you will do fine in whatever you do. I think you always have to rely on being guided by that divine power. Because I find that it's really comforting. As they say God will not fail you but if you try to do it yourself, that's where you run into problems. I know there are people who go from day to day and don't think about God but God helps those who don't even think about Him. I believe He truly helps those who put Him first in what they do and it's just a constant reminder... Remember God is there. Pray on it first and then go forward.

The literature review associated with this study purported that spirituality does not necessarily have to be connected to religion. In other words, while religion refers to the social, the public, and the organized means by which people relate to the sacred and the divine, spirituality describes such relations when they occur as a manifestation of the intrinsic nature of the individual. This study, however, indicated that for the African American female superintendent practicing in Virginia, the two are inseparable.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This phenomenological study explored the textural and structural aspects of spiritual leadership as described by African American female superintendents. The textural component describes what these superintendents experience regarding the phenomenon of spiritual leadership (Creswell, 2007). The structural component further examines how these women experienced spiritual leadership in terms of conditions, situations, and context (Creswell). This phenomenological study combined the elements of both textural and structural descriptions to arrive at the essence of spiritual leadership as described by the five participants in this study. The information obtained from the participants regarding their perspectives on spirituality and leadership was instrumental in formulating the answers to the following research questions.

Research Question 1

Do African American female superintendents in Virginia describe their leadership style as spiritual?

Finding 1: As described and detailed in Chapter 4, the short answer is yes. Each of the five superintendents who participated in this study described themselves as spiritual leaders. All were direct in their self reports. The superintendents had no problems or reservations about describing themselves as spiritual leaders.

Research Question 2

If they do, how do the perspectives and actions of these women contribute to our understanding of spirituality in a leadership context?

Finding 2: The themes that emerged from this study revealed that these remarkable women experienced inner peace and resiliency as a result of leading from a spiritual center, which helped them cope with day-to-day work challenges. Specifically, the superintendents reported that they experienced heightened levels of stress during the work day as they sought to balance their values with the sometimes competing values of the faculty, staff, parents, stakeholders, and governing bodies with whom they interacted at the office, at board meetings, and in community forums. The women interviewed also described the various political agendas that had become a significant, although an unwelcome, part of their daily lives as superintendents. These pressures—in conjunction with the heightened, more transparent, accountability systems mandated by the state and federal governments—all contributed to the stressors that accompany the superintendency.

In addition to specific work-related challenges, two of these women described their experiences with gender and/or racial discrimination as they worked to move their school divisions forward. However, as a direct result of the strong religious beliefs that they report were instilled in them many years ago as children, the superintendents voiced their ability to find inner peace and the resolve to continue on in the face of these adversities. Along their journey to the superintendency and during their tenure as superintendents, the women I interviewed described their determination to hold fast to their beliefs and make decisions that were “right” and in the best interest of their students and their school divisions, despite the many obstacles placed before them. Many times, they had to make these decisions based on more than considerations of existing policy, what was in fashion or socially/politically acceptable. Instead, these women often spoke of having to step out on faith, relying on their inner strengths and experiences, to shape their decision-making processes. They especially relied on these faith-based decisions

when making tough decisions or striving to maintain a more professional and discerning demeanor in the face of others who might be seeking to provoke knee-jerk, impulsive responses.

The superintendents spoke about making decisions that were sometimes unpopular. However, based on their strong beliefs in Biblical scriptures and teachings, they were able to hold fast to the will to do what they perceived was right. In fact, these women pinpointed several guiding principles and tenets that had emerged from their lived experiences and belief systems, such as leading with fairness, compassion, love, hope, patience, integrity and honesty. Additionally, the superintendents focused on being consistent, transparent and visible leaders who emphasized the importance of effective communication. These leaders described how they worked collaboratively in the organization to foster team and relationship building to empower all stakeholders to do what was in the best interest of the entire educational enterprise. All of the women shared that they had been able to hold true to their spiritual selves and make decisions from within, even though their decisions were sometimes met with opposition.

Research Question 3

How do African American female superintendents define and enact spiritual leadership in regards to their daily leadership practices?

Finding 3: The essence of spiritual leadership, as derived from the textural and structural aspects of the phenomenon, revealed that spiritual leadership as described by these participants was the ability to lead a school division by making decision based on the premise of treating others the way they want to be treated. One superintendent profoundly encompassed the belief system of all the participants in the study when she shared the following description:

There is an old saying—I'd rather see a sermon any day than to hear one. So my definition of spiritual leadership would be in my walk, as I said before. It's not just about how I carry myself. It's how I interact with my staff, my students, my community as a whole. It's my belief to perform a service in public education without expecting an award or recognition for what I do. To me that's spiritual leadership. I don't care who gets credit for it. I am superintendent and I don't care who gets the credit for it as long as I get it done and it's done the right way.

The five women in this study attributed such beliefs and selfless practices to a myriad of influences, including family upbringing, the impact of inspirational role models, and teachings in the Bible.

The superintendents described spiritual leaders not simply as managerial or instructional leaders who make decisions based solely on policy and the political temperament of the time. Instead, they viewed spiritual leaders as authentic and holistic individuals who do not rely on the criterion of a specific leadership style. In short, these women asserted that they depended very deeply on their intuition and what was inside of them. A superintendent provided clarity to a feeling that was expressed by all of her colleagues when she stated,

I try to keep my mind focused on my spiritual side and to basically, pray on it within.

Whatever I do, I do it not based on the fact that people are denigrating you or anything else but whatever you say or whatever you do, you do it with the understanding that you have a strength within you to withstand whatever is thrown at you and to basically pray on what you are doing and ask for guidance.

Without exception, these women asserted that what was inside them had been cultivated by their faith in God. He was leading them to do what they considered to be "right." Moreover, they

uniformly believed that their leadership style enabled them to lead in a manner that addressed the whole person as well as the whole institution. The sentiments of these five female African American superintendents were captured by the statement of one:

You know as an administrator, that much of what we deal with will be in terms of emotions. It's how we respond to the emotional cry they have. I've run across a lot of people and school administrators who were actually school managers. To me educational leadership is more than being a manager of people or manager of finances or managers of the buses, schedules, or manager of this, this and this. Some say I don't have time for parents, I don't have time for connecting, and I don't have time for this. Well you know in order to be successful you have to make the time.

In short, for these women, spiritual leadership encompassed the ability to not only be a managerial leader or an instructional leader. Instead, their faith-based style also enabled them to be leaders who considered the social, economic and emotional needs of those who worked within the enterprise, as well as those who were impacted by the actions of the enterprise, whether directly or indirectly. Because these superintendents truly believed that their role was to serve their school divisions based on spiritual values and beliefs, they described how the decisions they made could help their organizations become more successful, inclusive, and considerate of everyone involved in the enterprise.

Spiritual Leadership Theory Validation

Although Fry (2003), Fry and Whittington (2005b), and Benefiel (2005) put forth their own theories regarding the phenomenon of spiritual leadership, each of them used a somewhat similar lens to extrapolate the important aspects of spiritual leadership. For example, Fry spoke

about the holistic development of the leader and those being led through the development of the body, mind, heart and spirit in an effort to create a thriving enterprise. Fry placed a greater emphasis on leadership literature rather than literature that emphasized the spiritual aspect of the phenomenon. Following Fry's initial theory in 2003, he collaborated with Whittington to postulate that leaders must be able to motivate themselves and those being led in order to promote a sense of belonging that would be more likely to result in a better, more efficient organization.

Benefiel (2005) provided a slightly different perspective on the phenomenon as described by Fry (2003) and Fry and Whittington (2005b). Instead of advocating the simultaneous holistic development of both the leader and the followers, she argued that the leader must be developed holistically first and foremost. Benefiel also placed a greater emphasis on the spiritual component of spiritual leadership as evidenced in her findings. Specifically, she described the spiritual journey an individual must take to grow into a great leader who is able to guide an enterprise to success. It should be stressed, however, that neither Benefiel, Fry, nor Fry and Whittington specifically alluded to a higher power in their discussions. They refrained from linking spirituality to a specific deity or religious practice, thus lending credence to the fact that spirituality is not necessarily linked to religion.

The findings of this study, therefore, correspond to the theories developed by Benefiel (2005), Fry (2003) and Fry and Whittington (2005b), with respect to the notion that spiritual leadership does not necessarily have to be attributed a specific religion. The women who took part in this study agreed that spirituality was an internal force within each of them. They believed that it was something that had been placed within them, which was then externally manifested by way of a particular behavior or action. In other words, these women believed that

God had placed the spirit within them, and that, in turn, that spirit emerged from their core in the decisions they made and the ways they treated everyone with whom they came into contact. The five African American female superintendents practicing in the Commonwealth of Virginia who took part in this research agreed that superintendents can lead from a spiritual core without crediting a particular entity or religion for their actions. However, for these women, their spiritual leadership practices were grounded in their faith in God and the Holy Bible. As exemplified by the superintendents' statements in Chapter 4, their belief in Christianity allowed them adhere to the teachings of the Holy Bible while in service to faculty, staff, students and constituents.

For these women it is clear that there exists one common thread—namely, that their leadership practices and decision-making processes are connected to their religion and the spiritual beliefs associated with it. However, for others who also lead public school divisions capably and fairly this might not be the case. The pivotal difference is a spiritual leader's connection to Christianity—and their reliance on beliefs and premises found in the Holy Bible that provide a terra firma for arriving at a particular decision.

Although I stated earlier my belief that these five leaders met the criteria of spiritual leadership as set forth by Benefiel (2005), Fry (2003) and Fry and Whittington (2005b), I would argue for the closest approximation to Benefiel's theory—and particularly the five stages of a spiritual journey as experienced by a spiritual leader (Figure 3). In other words, these women all focused on their physical, social, emotional, and spiritual development initially, which enabled them to positively impact the various facets of their organizations.

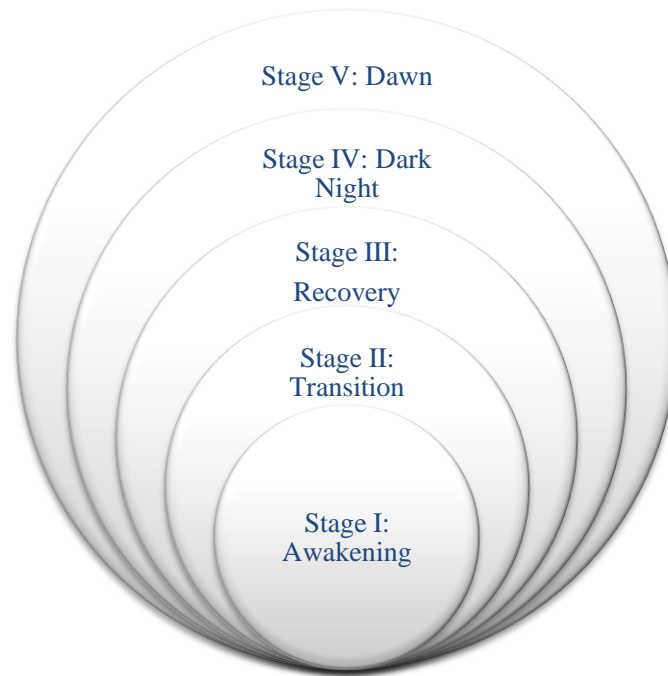


Figure 3: Benefiel's Five Stages of the Spiritual Journey as Experienced by the Spiritual Leader

As noted, Benefiel (2005) suggested that spiritual leaders encounter the five stages shown in Figure 3 during their development: Awakening, Transition, Recovery, Night, and Dawn. Throughout this study, a common theme emerged in that the participants described their metamorphosis into a spiritual leader as a journey. In my view, this journey aligns with each of the stages laid out by Benefiel.

Stage I: Awakening. As the women advanced in their careers toward the position of superintendent—and with that their growing acceptance of additional leadership requirements—the superintendents became more aware of “spiritual realities as they sought connections with others on their spiritual quest” (Benefiel, 2005, p. 733). Once they attained the superintendency, the participants experienced a level of fullness since they were confident that their clear leadership vision could help move their school division forward as they led from their hearts and soul. They experienced a level of fullness at this stage of Benefiel's process.

Stage II: Transition. Once in the position of superintendent—i.e., the highest position in PK-12 education—they experienced some “sense of isolation as they questioned their spiritual path and its significance as they went about the work” (Benefiel, 2005, p.733). Because the superintendency is at the ceiling of the educational leadership hierarchy (making that person accountable to so many different stakeholders), it can become difficult for some to find the tenacity to stand on purpose; however, these women moved quickly through Stage II.

Stage III: Recovery. Following Stage II, which involves a level of uncertainty, the superintendents were able, through time and the experience of being new superintendents, to “discover new ways to connect with others on the spiritual path” as they related to the realities of this leadership position (Benefiel, 2005, p. 733). They discovered various ways of working with their faculties and staffs in their role as a superintendent who practiced spiritual leadership. These women developed and enhanced the ways in which they related to others on their spiritual journey and as a result experienced “renewed joy and fullness” (Benefiel, p. 733).

Stage IV: Dark Night. As noted in Chapter 4, there were occasions when the women felt challenged and at times attacked in their leadership role, which corresponds to Benefiel’s (2005) “Dark Night” stage. In response, they turned to Practice I: Ritual and Routines—Utilization of Prayer for Protection and Guidance, which gave them the strength to endure and move through the dark night stage. There are times, however, when “spiritual practices are not yielding the expected transformations” (Benefiel,p.733), which can make a strong leader even stronger.

Stage V: Dawn. The spiritual leader endeavors to work within this stage. This is the stage at which superintendents “get revitalized to work toward the higher good and they [experience a] sense of alignment with a transcendent power” (Benefiel, 2005, p. 733). This stage was evidenced throughout this study. The five African American female superintendents

who took part in this study continually worked to do what was right since they not only recognized their accountability to those they served as leaders of their school division, but they also recognized their accountability to a high power—God. The findings from this study showed time and again that these women practiced spiritual leadership in ways that empowered and motivated faculty, staff, students, parents, and the at-large community to help create educational institutions of excellence.

Summary

The superintendents interviewed for this study believed that they were able to lead large and small school divisions to success because of their unwavering faith. This faith was the result of sacrifices and struggles, as well as successes and celebrations—all of which reinforced a sense that their lives were unfolding as planned by a higher being. Undeterred by disappointments and reinforced by victories, these African American female superintendents were able to stand in the face of adversity, empathize with everyone involved in the educational enterprise, and serve as examples for others to emulate. Although they were immensely proud of what they had accomplished, they gave credit for their success and the success of those who worked with them to a higher power they called God or Christ. Moreover, they understood that there was still a great deal of work to be done to transform their organizations and to move their school divisions forward. Without exception, they said they welcomed the challenge.

Although this study lends validity to Benefiel's (2005) theory, the practices of these superintendents also reinforce the theory proposed by Fry and Whittington (2005b). A significant component of Fry and Whittington's research is the notion that "spiritual leadership taps into the fundamental needs of both leader and follower for spiritual survival through calling and membership" (Fry & Whittington, p. 22). In other words, it is not possible to lead from a

spiritual center without influencing one's followers, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This notion was perhaps more clearly evidenced for the superintendents in the smaller divisions. These women spoke eloquently of how their followers embraced their spiritual leadership style, reinforcing the view that their chosen profession represented a true calling which was helping to catapult their school divisions towards success. This is not to say that this process does not occur in larger divisions. Regardless of the size of the division, it was the goal of each of these superintendents to use spiritual leadership to foster greater achievement for their school divisions. They also recognized, however, that this feat could not be accomplished solely on their own. This view also aligns with the theory of Fry and Whittington who found that "it [spiritual leadership] seeks to create vision and value congruence across the individual, empowered team and organization levels and, ultimately, to foster higher levels of organizational commitment and productivity" (p.22). Although the beliefs of these superintendents remained grounded in Christianity, these women endeavored to practice spiritual leadership in a manner that was inclusive of all stakeholders as they sought to foster a sense of community and belonging within their organizations.

It is clear, therefore, that spirituality impacts the leadership practices of leaders in a myriad of settings, which is understandable since it represents a personal belief system that transcends organizational barriers. Stated a little differently, spirituality represents a focal point rather than a thematic component of spiritual leadership. As such, it results in a form of leadership that allows leaders to take into account the goals of both servant and transformational leadership. In other words, the decisions and actions of spiritual leaders are guided both by the need to serve as well by a genuine interest in developing their employees to their fullest potential. Unlike those two forms of authentic leadership, however, spiritual leadership involves

a level of transcendence where leaders make decisions based on doing what is right as they recognize their accountability to a higher power. These are dynamic leaders who are able to incorporate the premises of various leadership styles into their decision-making processes. They are able to draw upon deeply-held beliefs that ultimately helped them develop into the leaders that they are.

Implications for Leadership Practices in Education and Other Sectors

To reiterate, the purpose of this study was to examine the spirituality-based leadership styles of African American female superintendents in Virginia and to gain a better understanding of their chosen form of leadership. Additionally, this study sought to discover how these superintendents integrated spirituality into their leadership practices, which I believed would augment the existing body of knowledge regarding the phenomenon of spiritual leadership. This study was unique in that five of the six practicing African American female superintendents in the entire Commonwealth of Virginia shared private details of one of the most personal aspects of their lives—their spirituality. They openly described the impact that their personal spiritual beliefs had had on their very public leadership practices. Their belief in Christianity and their faith-based journey toward attaining the superintendency were instrumental in shaping their leadership pedagogy.

The completion of this study means that the views of these women regarding spirituality and leadership will be available to a range of audiences—both in education and in other sectors as well. I believe that the literature review conducted for this study and the research results described herein provide ample support for the utilization of this relatively new form of leadership. Indeed, as shown in Chapter 2, spiritual leadership has already positively impacted the business sector.

There are many leaders in education and elsewhere who practice spiritual leadership—although perhaps with varying levels of awareness. On the one hand are these five female African American female superintendents who embrace the lessons of the Holy Bible and knowingly implement them in their daily practices. On the other hand are individuals who simply try to apply “The Golden Rule” in their leadership practices. Are they too practicing spiritual leadership? -- Most certainly since their decisions emit from a set of core beliefs.

The results of this study argue for a greater emphasis on the affective components of education and leadership. There was a time when education and leadership focused on the creation and development of managerial and instructional leaders. With the onset of greater state and federal accountability, ever-higher benchmarks for success, a declining economy, and heightened levels of uncertainty in every aspect of life, the need to create leaders who are concerned and adept at meeting the social and emotional needs of the varying stakeholders—thereby successfully impacting their organizations—should be forefront of leadership pedagogy and practices.

Administrator Preparation

Educational design efforts aimed at enhancing administrative and leadership skills can no longer afford to merely teach pedagogy. Instead, they must provide educational leadership courses that embed strategies to teach future superintendents and administrators how to holistically support their stakeholders. Education is now in the business of doing more than teaching; it is in the business of providing wrap-around services for leaders who perform the tasks that have been set before them. They must embrace and internalize the concept that children and adults do not care about what you know—until they know that you care about them as people. Education must begin to embrace this notion and foster leading from the spirit.

Experience in the Field

When a person leads from the spirit, according to the participants in this study, they are able to make important decisions, tough decisions, and even unpopular decisions—because they are secure in the knowledge that they did what is right and best for the population they serve. To promulgate that view to a wider circle of practitioners, individuals must be provided with experiences “in the field” to build judgment and to acquire the resolve to rely on their inner spirit to make sound decisions. Leaders should not be afraid to embrace spiritual leadership as long as it does not cross the line between church and state. A leader can practice this form of leadership which is authentic and true to the values and beliefs the leader possess. As described in this dissertation, it is a form of leadership that allows a leader to serve and inevitably transform the organization because such a leader can serve as a motivator who drives others to realize a vision that is beneficial for the entire enterprise, regardless of context or circumstances. It is imperative, therefore, that prospective leaders and persons aspiring to the superintendency receive the support of their stakeholders as they practice what might be perceived by some who are unfamiliar with this form of leadership as an unlawful connection between church and state. Rather, this form of leadership represents that individual’s ability to make decisions based not only on secular educational policy and procedures, but also on beliefs that are biblically based, grounded in intuition, and directed first and foremost at prioritizing the good of the organization and its entire constituency. Trusting an individual who leads from the spirit would allow them to witness the power of leading from the soul, which could then result in the promulgation of spiritual leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study included female participants who were of African American decent practicing their craft in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Future research should be conducted in other areas and with other cohorts to further validate and lend credibility to the impact of spiritual leadership. Specifically:

- In the future, a broader sample must be incorporated into qualitative studies regarding spiritual leadership. A study encompassing states beyond the Commonwealth of Virginia would serve as an excellent opportunity to discover the impact of spirituality on the leadership practices of all superintendents.
- Comparative studies of all superintendents by race, gender, region or locality, and creed would also provide a wealth of knowledge to build upon the literature regarding spiritual leadership.
- The body of literature regarding the phenomenon of spirituality and leadership could be enhanced by exploring these constructs according to participants' race in a particular state, region, or country, or according to gender in a particular state, region, or country.
- Women's Studies programs could benefit by exploring the leadership practices of all female superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia and in other regions of the country.
- Schools of Business and Education should consider incorporating case studies of leaders who practice spiritual leadership not only in Virginia but also in neighboring states to add greater clarity to the construct.

- Research regarding spiritual leadership will not only benefit from the study of individuals in the position of superintendent, but also by focusing on leaders at the highest levels of other organizations. Thus, exploratory efforts should continue to build upon the link between the business sector and the educational enterprise in terms of the relationships between leadership practices and spirituality.
- Quantitative instruments must be developed from qualitative studies to explore the intended and unintended consequences that superintendents encounter as a result of leading from a spiritual center.
- Lastly, further qualitative and quantitative research must be conducted to validate the need to practice this form of leadership in the field of education and beyond. The literature regarding the effectiveness of integrating spirituality and leadership must be strengthened. To these ends, further qualitative and quantitative research is recommended.

To conclude, in these times of political unrest, financial decline and uncertainty, the call for holistic leadership practices embedded in the spiritual may be warranted.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Introduction

Date

Superintendent Name

School Division Name

School Division Address

Dear (Superintendent Name):

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Department of Educational Leadership. I am also currently the principal at Jefferson Elementary School in Sussex County, VA. I am writing to ask for your voluntary participation in a research project exploring spirituality and leadership practices.

The title of my dissertation is The Perspectives of Practicing African American Female Superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia Regarding the Impact of Spirituality on Their Leadership Practices. This study will examine the ways in which superintendents describe their leadership styles. I am particularly interested in how African American female superintendents in Virginia integrate spirituality into their leadership practices.

Your participation in this study will entail three interviews each lasting approximately 45 minutes. All data provided by you will be confidential and your identity will be protected. The collected data will be placed in a safe box during the study and all data, the recording device and the consent form will be locked in a file cabinet in a secured office at the conclusion of the study.

There are no anticipated risks to you for participating in this project nor are there any expected benefits to be derived from your participation in this dissertation research project. This project has been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Research (IRB).

Your participation in this study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding educational leadership, spirituality, and the relatively new phenomenon described as spiritual leadership.

If you have any questions, please call me at (804)513-1661, or email me at smithsr7@vcu.edu. I will follow up with you via email to see if you are interested in participating in the study. I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shannon Smith

Appendix B: Superintendent's Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol #1: The Perspectives of Practicing African American Female

Superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia Regarding the Impact of Spirituality on Their Leadership Practices

Interview Guide

1. Introduction, purpose of interview, and confidentiality.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me to discuss your feelings and thoughts about your leadership style. You and five other African American female superintendents will participate in this study.

The purpose of the study is to better comprehend what standards impact your leadership style. I will ask you about your leadership style and nature of your leadership practices and your views regarding leadership and how those views and perspectives impact your decision making process.

All you share with me will be confidential. I will not share the information with any staff member or any other person or agency that could have an adverse impact on your position as a superintendent. I will, however, share the dissertation with the other superintendents involved in the study as well as the dissertation committee members. Your name or any other names you may mention in the interview will not be used, neither will any other information that could identify you.

I would like to tape record the interview so that I can remember everything you say. Is that acceptable to you? I will later transcribe the interview word by word and you will receive a copy. I will make any changes or additions that you request.

During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions I ask, please let me know. I expect the interview will last half an hour to an hour. But you can stop the interview at any time you wish.

If you give me your permission to use this information, please sign this form. Do you have any questions before we start?

The interview will then proceed with soliciting information about ideas, concepts, and issues in the following areas:

2. Demographic Information

- a) Age
- b) Educational background
- c) What are your years of experience as a superintendent?
- d) How many school divisions have you served in this capacity?
- e) How would you describe each school division served?
- f) Information about family and childhood

3. Spirituality

- a) Tell me the story of the journey to the superintendency (Smith, 2007).
- b) When did you know you wanted to be a superintendent (Smith, 2007)?

- c) What are some words that you would use to describe how you lead your school division (Thankappan, 2005)?

4. Spirituality and Leadership Practices

- a) How do those things impact your leadership practices (Thankappan, 2005)?

5. Spiritual Leadership and the Decision Making Process

- a) What is your one, most prized vision for your school division (Rezach, 2002)?
- b) What is it that you do when you have to make an important decision?
- c) What values inform your decision-making in your position (Rezach, 2002)?
- d) How did you form those values (Rezach, 2002)?

6. Closure

I do not have any additional questions. Is there anything you would like to add? Something you believe I should know.

Thank you for being willing to share your feelings and thoughts with me. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with the information you have given. I will be forwarding you a copy of the interview for your review so you can make changes or additions. Again, thank you.

Interview Protocol #2: The Perspectives of Practicing African American Female
Superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia Regarding the Impact of Spirituality on Their
Leadership Practices

Interview Guide

1. Introduction, purpose of interview, and confidentiality.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me again to discuss your feelings and thoughts about your leadership style and the impact of spirituality and your perspective regarding the practice of spiritual leadership. You and five other African American female superintendents will participate in this study.

More specifically, the purpose of the study is to better understand how spirituality impacts your leadership style. I will ask you about your leadership style and the influence of spirituality, how spirituality manifests itself into your leadership practices and your views on spiritual leadership and its impact regarding your decision making process.

To reiterate, all you share with me will be confidential. I will not share the information with any staff member or any other person or agency that could have an adverse impact on your position as a superintendent. I will, however, share the dissertation with the other superintendents involved in the study as well as the dissertation committee members. Your name or any other names you may mention in the interview will not be used, neither will any other information that could identify you.

I would like to tape record the interview so that I can remember everything you say. Is that acceptable to you? I will later transcribe the interview word by word and you will receive a copy. I will make any changes or additions that you request.

During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions I ask, please let me know. I expect the interview will last half an hour to an hour. But you can stop the interview at any time you wish.

If you give me your permission to use this information, please sign this form.

Do you have any questions before we start?

The interview will then proceed with soliciting information about ideas, concepts, and issues in the following areas:

2. Spirituality

- a) In what way does spirituality influence your work as a superintendent (Hooper-Atlas, 2002)?

3. Spirituality and Leadership Practices

- a) Can you give me an example of how you have used your spirituality to inform your leadership (Smith, 2007)?
- b) How have your spiritual beliefs evolved over time (Hooper-Atlas, 2002)?
- c) What activities do you partake in that help you to develop your spirituality (Thankappan, 2005)?

4. Spiritual Leadership and the Decision Making Process

- a) Are there any particular challenges for you as a superintendent who leads from a spiritually-centered leadership style especially with regards to the political nature of your position (Smith, 2007)?
- b) In what ways do you apply spiritual leadership to increase your organization's capacity to meet those challenges (Thankappan, 2005)?

5. Closure

I do not have any additional questions. Is there anything you would like to add? Something you believe I should know.

Thank you for being willing to share your feelings and thoughts with me. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with the information you have given. I will be forwarding you a copy of the interview for your review so you can make changes or additions. Again, thank you.

Interview Protocol #3: The Perspectives of Practicing African American Female Superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia Regarding the Impact of Spirituality on Their Leadership Practices

Interview Guide

1. Introduction, purpose of interview, and confidentiality.

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me this last time to discuss your feelings and thoughts about your leadership style and the impact of spirituality and your perspective regarding the practice of spiritual leadership.

The purpose of the study is to better understand how spirituality impacts your leadership style. I will ask you about your leadership style and the influence of spirituality, how spirituality manifests itself into your leadership practices and your views on spiritual leadership and its impact regarding your decision making process.

All you share with me will be confidential. I will not share the information with any staff member or any other person or agency that could have an adverse impact on your position as a superintendent. I will, however, share the dissertation with the other superintendents involved in the study as well as the dissertation committee members. Your name or any other names you may mention in the interview will not be used, neither will any other information that could identify you.

I would like to tape record the interview so that I can remember everything you say. Is that acceptable to you? I will later transcribe the interview word by word and you will receive a copy. I will make any changes or additions that you request.

During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions I ask, please let me know. I expect the interview will last half an hour to an hour. But you can stop the interview at any time you wish.

If you give me your permission to use this information, please sign this form.

Do you have any questions before we start?

The interview will then proceed with soliciting information about ideas, concepts, and issues in the following areas:

2. Demographic Information

- a) Describe the level of success your school division has experienced since your leadership was instituted. Please include but do not limit your responses to the following:
 - a.graduation rate,
 - a.attendance,
 - b.dropout rate, and
 - c. the attainment of Adequate Yearly Progress and state accreditation.

3. Spirituality

- a) Tell me any additional information regarding your spirituality beyond the work place that you would like to share at this time?

4. Spirituality and Leadership Practices

- a) Please share any additional information pertaining to the relationship between spirituality and leadership practice.

5. Spiritual Leadership and the Decision Making Process

- a) Would you describe yourself as a person who practices spiritual leadership?
- b) Tell me any additional thoughts that you have regarding spiritual leadership and how decisions are made as the leader of a public school division

6. Closure

I do not have any additional questions. Is there anything you would like to add? Something you believe I should know.

Thank you for being willing to share your feelings and thoughts with me. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with the information you have given. I will be forwarding you a copy of the interview for your review so you can make changes or additions. Again, thank you.

Appendix C: Consent to Participate Form

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE: The Perspectives of Practicing African American Female Superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia Regarding the Impact of Spirituality on Their Leadership Practices

VCU IRB NO.: HM13107

You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to better comprehend what standards impact your leadership style. I will ask you and five other African American female superintendents serving in Virginia, about your leadership style and nature of your leadership practices and your views regarding leadership and how those views and perspectives impact your decision making process.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and understand what will happen to you.

In this study you and five other participants will be asked to participate in three forty-five minute interviews. These interviews will be conducted in the field and at your convenience. The initial interview will solicit demographic information as well as information pertaining to your leadership practices and leadership style. The second interview will ask questions that delve into your perceptions of spirituality and its impact on your leadership style and your decision making processes. Lastly, the third

interview will serve as a follow up interview, providing each participant with the opportunity to share any additional information regarding leadership and spirituality. This study is slated to be conducted over the course of two months.

All you share with me will be confidential. I will not share the information with any staff member or any other person or agency that could have an adverse impact on your position as a superintendent. I will, however, share the dissertation with the other superintendents involved in the study as well as the dissertation committee members.

I would like to tape record the interview so that I can remember everything you say. I will later transcribe the interview word by word and you will receive a copy. I will make any changes or additions that you request.

Significant new findings developed during the course of the research which may relate to your willingness to continue participation will be provided to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions I ask, please let me know. You are not required to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but, the information we learn from people in this study may help us design better educational leadership programs as well as enhance the practices of those leading in the educational enterprise.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend sharing your perspectives during the interview process.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is to decline participation in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Data are being collected only for research purposes. This information will be secured during the course of the study in a lock box. Information from the study and the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University. Once the study concludes the consent forms will be stored in locked file cabinets in a secure office, separate from other study documents as it will be the only document linking you to the study. Your name or any other names you may mention in the interview will not be used, neither will any other information that could identify you. Your data will be identified by ID numbers, not names, and stored in a locked research area. Access to all data will be limited to study personnel.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

The interview sessions will be audio taped, but no names will be recorded. At the beginning of the session, I will ask that you use fictitious names only so that no “real” names are recorded. The tapes and all collected data including notes, recordings and transcripts will be stored in a fireproof lock box. The tapes and the recording device along with other collected data and the consent forms will be stored in locked file cabinets in a secure office at the conclusion of the study.

.VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff without your consent. The reasons might include:

- the study staff thinks it necessary for your health or safety;
- you have not followed study instructions;
- the sponsor has stopped the study; or
- administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

CHAROL SHAKESHAFT, PH.D.

Professor and Chairperson

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SHANNON SMITH

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If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

You may also contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else. Additional information about participation in research studies can be found at
<http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm>

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study and that I am consenting to the electronic recording of all interview sessions. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

Participant name printed

Participant signature

Date

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent

Date

Discussion / Witness

Principal Investigator Signature (if different from above)

Date

Appendix D: Coding Spreadsheet: Clusters with Corresponding Selected Individual Statements

Selected Individual Statements that Compose Clusters	Cluster
<p>SA-This job is tough enough but I would hazard to say that it is tougher for women than it is for men and that's a given. Having a strong spiritual base keeps me coming to work. SC- Here there is just an historical backward racism in this town. Based on what I've learned since I've been here.</p>	<p>Experiencing Race and Gender Discrimination</p>
<p>SB-I'm not teaching them... Maybe by my behavior I'm teaching someone but I'm not trying to teach someone my religion. What I'm doing is acknowledging what I believe and I have a right to do that. I don't find it to be a conflict. SC-I'm following policy. We're here for these children. We're here for the citizens of this community. We're here to do a job. We're not here to get into your political beliefs or your personal beliefs. We're here to do a job. SD-They have to use their discretion and they follow policies. Even though sometimes I may think you could have done a little bit better with your discretion you know. But that's when I step out knowing that if I have to tell someone, especially an administrator, that perhaps they didn't make the best choice. I will support that choice. Then I'll pray Lord don't let anything else come up as a fall out from that.</p>	<p>Recognizing Separation of Church and State</p>
<p>SA- I try to talk to them about doing what's right regardless as to what their religious beliefs are. I believe God, who represents a supreme being represents all of the different religions. SC- The first thing is that we'll always keep children first. I'll stop saying that but with every decision it's automatic. We're going to do it in the best interest of kids. Let me go back and at least you'll catch it on here—do the right thing. You can come to the table if you have a problem. They know I expect them to bring a solution if they have one or we know we have to come to a solution together. Then we can go all the way around robin hood's barn but in the end they know my final question is going to be – what's the right thing to do? What's the right thing? We're going to make it work! I just think I had a good upbringing. First of all you treat people right. I do the right thing because you know if you don't it's going to come back to you. I believe in treating people right; doing the right thing and these are all grounded in the bible or spirituality I believe. SD- I treated my welfare mother and I still do for anyone who may not be as privileged or blessed as I am the same way I treat the lawyer's wife and kids, you know. I had the good fortune of teaching a lot of the professors' kids. I said as a teacher, and I still say it as an administrator, I want for other people's kids what I want for my own and I want the very best for my</p>	<p>Striving to “Do the Right Thing”</p>

own. It's about respect. I also learned many years ago from some of those master teachers, those old teachers, that taught me or I learned as an instructional aide that on your way up the ladder, you're going to pass some people, on your way down the ladder you will pass those same people. Don't forget that. So if you stepped on them on your way up they're going to remember when you are coming back down.

SA- I try to make decisions that are right and decisions that I know that I would not have problems looking at myself in the mirror. And I pray for guidance, for making those decisions and direction. **SB-** The whole idea of forgiveness is extremely important. You should always support people and provide for them what they need in order to grow and develop. That we all make mistakes and none of us are dispensable and we should invest in one another. I invest in my staff. I support my staff. I always want to help them to move forward-supporting them to move forward. There are times that tough decisions have to be made but even when a staff member makes a mistake there's an opportunity to correct that mistake and that comes from knowing that I've made mistakes and Christ has forgiven me. The same thing I've received I want to give to others. **SC-** You have to take it day to day. But the thing is, first of all, you just have to have common sense number one. You have to have a knack of being able to think on your feet. Make sound decisions. Sometimes you might miss the mark. Then you have to have strength behind whatever you do. Here again I check myself and reroute myself to just deal with it a little more professionally, I'll get back to you or I'll research it or whatever. **SD-** I don't need to be confrontational – which some people are. As I said, I don't have to claim I know it all. But I will tell people that's what an education does for you. It tells you how to get the right answers and to get back with people. **SE-** You kind of have to take a deep breath. Remember not to react immediately. Think about it and I will be honest—pray. Just pray on it. Even if you are at your desk –just pray on it. Because it is so easy to let an issue, especially if it catches you off guard, just all of a sudden overwhelms you and you're reacting in a way that probably if you had thought a little bit more about it you would have handled it a little bit differently. Just taking a deep breath and trying to think about it. As I said, always pray about it.

SC- Well, I tell you it is an evolution. I should be like Joel Olsteen and Joyce Meyers, they got so many stories—I got some to tell too. She has kids on crack. Oh my God just destroyed their lives. One daughter had cancer. She has not waived one bit. Not one bit. You would never hear her (sigh)... Never, Never, Never. **SD-** It came from 1st Corinthians 13th chapter and part of that 13th chapter is part of an oath that I take whenever I'm in my chapter – Faith, hope, and charity but the greatest of these is charity and charity is love. Basically that's part of my spiritual foundation as well. **SE-** If I know that they have a spiritual background

**Relying on
Spiritual
Foundation for
Strength & Sound
Decision-Making**

**Enhancing
Spiritual Growth
via the Examples of
Others**

and most of them do then I can talk to them and say ‘you know how to pray’ and go from there.

SB- I think, on that Christ is who I am and his life through me is who I am. Whether it’s leadership, or being a mother or wife, whatever I do it is to honor and glorify Christ. That’s it. **SC-** Sometimes it’s just a gut and your intuition or whatever you want to call it then you have to kind of go with it. I guess I would define it as a ... I would love to know the real definition of it so I’m going to look that up when you go but... my definition would be it’s a relationship with God. It’s a belief in God. It’s a trust in God but at the same time it’s a ... it’s like a universal kind of thing too. Because I believe that what we speak is where you’re going. It’s like a two-fold thing. The relationship on this side but it’s a universal piece that you have to be good to others; you’ve got to treat others the way you want to be treated. You have to be passionate and you have to be patient. I think that’s all part of that spirit in you. It’s about what your spirit is. That’s what it means to me. To bring about whatever... because that spirit is in you and it’s supposed to work out of you so God’s spirit comes out. I think that’s what it’s supposed to be. It’s like 3 fold because that’s another part. **SD-** I know whose I am. I know whose child I am. Bottom line is part of growing up is understanding that you can accomplish much but you don’t have to let people know what you’re accomplishing. Just continue to walk and show what you can do without making ... without becoming very loud with it. I have a humble spirit and so I think some people mistake that. I don’t care who gets credit for the work that has to be done for our students as long as it gets done. So I don’t have a problem. I know whose I am.

Realization of Identity- Belonging to God

SA- I pray a lot. I try my best to receive thoughts from a higher power when these decisions are made. **SB-** Christ is who I am and his life through me is who I am. Whether it’s leadership, or being a mother or wife, or whatever, I do it to honor and glorify Christ. That’s it. **SC-** You have to take care of them all. I think that’s what my strength has been—I’m here for everybody but the children come first. How many kids have I had in my house that lived with me, got out of school because their parents are crack-heads or whatever? They lived in my house. Don’t tell me that I’m not here for the best interest of kids. **SD-** I want for other people’s kids what I want for my own and I want the very best for my own. It’s just God. I move because He says and I move because He says and I do because He says and I’m willing to do and I know I owe it all to Him. **SE-** I truly believe that we are all sent here for a purpose. In order to mature and reach that purpose you have to understand that you are going to go through things. I have a basic belief in a higher power, God and therefore, whenever I’m making a decision, whatever I’m trying to do in my work place, then ultimately I am trying to do what is right. What I think is approved spiritually.

Assigning Purpose to Position

SA- I start out every morning reading the bible and getting myself at peace with God because every day there is an adversarial situation that comes my way helping me to understand that some people are just evil and for me to keep my poise and my head at all times. So your inner most thoughts have to be given to God. **SB-** Reading the bible is a normal part of my everyday life and taking the word of God and allowing Christ to work in me and through me to develop me into who Christ wants me to be. It is a normal part of my life. **SC-** 6:30, 7:00, and 7:30. I don't have to be here until 8:30 and then I'll do Joyce again at 8 before I even get here and watch her 20 minutes or I'm listening by that point because I'm getting ready. Wednesday mornings I watch Bill Winston. He's at 7:30. So you know that's every day. That's almost like my dose of medicine in the morning before I walk in here. **SD-** One of the things I do is pray daily on my way to work, my car is my closet. **SE-** I make it a practice to read spiritual books. I read the Bible of course. I also make it a practice to spend a lot time reading spiritual growth books. And I find them very helpful.

Ascribing to Rituals and Spiritual Routines

SA- I guess it was my fate and it was a plan that was developed for me. This is about spiritualism and by God and I just walked with it. **SB-** I had not mapped the journey. That's for sure! **SC-** Who would have thought in just this short period of time I would have started as the little teacher, said I wasn't going to do it and end up as a superintendent. It's just really interesting. When things like that happen it just confirms with me that God is in control. Well that's basically what I just said. It's all in just trusting and believing that as long as I'm doing those things that are according to His plan. His plan will reign. **SD-** But you said something earlier about what does spirituality—what does it have to do with all of this? By virtue of the fact, I know I didn't do it by myself. Because I was still working in the church and praying and believing so a lot of that happened with me. It's part of God's plan- the reason why I'm in this county. And I serve as superintendent and a lot of people don't understand that.

Believing in Divine Intervention

SA- It is difficult and I can't tell you how many people have told me that they pray for me every day and I readily accept it and ask them to continue. As many voices that are going up, I feel that's going to be my fence that's going to be built around me. **SC-** So many times before a meeting probably 99% of the time before a meeting I'm going to say it out loud – Praise the Lord for His mercy endureth forever. Then I know I'm covered. **SD-** Life has not always been easy. As Langston Hughes would say 'Life for me ain't been no crystal stair'. I believe in the power of prayer. I keep God first because I know I'm blessed. **SE-** First and foremost, first thing is always drawing on your spiritual background saying dear Lord direct me. If I step out, nudge me so I will know it and

Utilization of Prayer for Protection and Guidance

come back. I know there are people who go from day to day and don't think about God but God helps those who don't even think about Him. I believe He truly helps those who put Him first in what they do and it's just a constant reminder... Remember God is there. Pray on it first and then go forward.

SA- Allow yourself to be guided by the basic tenets of your beliefs. Whether it's the Bible, the Koran or whatever is your basis for your spiritual beliefs, and revert back to it in tough times.**SB-** I think about decisions that I make --- Am I going to be giving love in this process, am I going to be effecting someone else's life and adding value to their life by giving them love, by making a decision that is rooted in love and that's grounded in love? The whole idea of forgiveness is extremely important. You should always support people and provide for them what they need in order to grow and develop. We all make mistakes and none of us are dispensable and we should invest in one another so I invest in my staff. I support my staff. I always want to help them to move forward-supporting them to move forward. There are times that tough decisions have to be made but even when a staff member makes a mistake there's an opportunity to correct that mistake and that comes from knowing that I've made mistakes. Christ has forgiven me so the same thing I've received I want to give to others. **SC-** Even in my job, I'm trying to bring comfort and peace to these kids, to people around me. I'm the peace maker. I've always been. There are just some things you have to do because the policy dictates what you have to do. But beyond that scheme, I think it is very spiritual because first of all anything I do is going to be in the best interest of children first and foremost. That's not a policy. Therefore, that's common sense in this role first and foremost. At the same time I will believe that it just stems off of treating others as you want them to treat you, which is a basic premise of spirituality. **SD-** The experiences I've had will allow me to allow you to shine and I don't have a problem with decisions that are made as long as I'm informed. Communicate with me. Sometimes I'll walk away and I'll say I have it all right here. I do my best thinking when I'm alone and that's spiritual because then it's like I have to think about this looking at the big picture then I'll call a meeting. **SE-** If you want to be a good leader then I think you have to have a strong spiritual base. I'm sure there are those who may not have it. But I think ultimately you've got it by higher divinity.

Leading Spiritually

SA- I understand that this is a job and I'm dealing with people and lives of children, lives of adults on a day to day basis. **SB-** I pray about almost every decision and I would like to say every one but it's not every one because sometimes I make them without to my chagrin. But I literally pray about almost every decision that I make. It's difficult to identify specifically how it's used because every thought that I have is influenced by my relationship with Christ. Decisions that I make are influenced by

Growing Spiritually with Wisdom

what I believe with Christ. I pray about decisions before I make them. I am a leader, I am a child of Christ and I am a leader. Because Christ is first it influences everything I do. That's it. It's rather simplistic. That's just it. I can go through and probably tell you some of the principals on which I rely but you'll find all of them right in the Bible. That's what guides my life. I'm not going to make a decision that's solely based on benefitting me. So I may do the same thing some other people do, I may do things the same way but our reason may be different for why we do it.

SC- But then as I journeyed through my experiences, especially when it came to this level, I said now I know why she sat with that bible behind her. It was her protection that kept her grounded. I can appreciate that now. Although I don't sit with it, you can see I sit with my Bible close to me. Some days I want to put it in the chair because it will keep me grounded. If you don't stay grounded a lot of time, with the different situations that come up, you can fly off into somewhere that you don't want to be.

SD- I step out on faith. If I have to make a super important decision, I think about it and I make a decision and I step out on faith. With my spiritual leadership, I want to empower you. I want to support you, I want to enable but I also want to ensure that you are doing the right thing. So truth is the last thing that's there. When we don't deal with the truth, we're in trouble. So in terms of spiritual leadership I will not sweep things under the rug. I'll keep it right there on the table. It doesn't always need to be addressed immediately either; sometimes you just say, I'm not going there yet. But the elephant symbolizes, I'm not forgetting. One of the books in the children's library- Horton Hears a Who - I think it says an elephant is faithful 100%. In terms of my being truthful and faithful to a cause and believing in what I do, I am going be truthful 100% and deal with that. It may not always be pleasant and there are some unpopular decisions that we make sometimes but if it's made based on the wisdom and truth, I always believe that God will carry me through it. So I'm ok with that.

SE- You have to understand that God's time is not your time and you cannot rush whatever it is for you but He won't fail you. A lot of people bicker about what's in the Bible what's not in the Bible what God is and what God isn't. I don't like to spend a lot of time doing that. It's in you. God has placed His spirit in you. If you rely on that then you will be fine. I don't spend a lot of time talking about religion because religion is anything you want to make it. If you worry about Baptist, Catholic, whatever, then you really have a problem. If there's one God, then you have to accept it-- that there's one God. People may put names on it but you have to understand it's in you.

VITA

Shannon Smith was born on June 7, 1971, in Richmond, Virginia. She graduated from New Kent County High School, New Kent, Virginia in 1989. She received her Bachelor of Science in Biology from James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia in 1993. She received a Master in Teaching from Virginia Commonwealth University in 1996 and subsequently taught in the public schools of Richmond City for four years. She received a Post-Masters Certification in the Principalship from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2000. She has served as Assistant principal for the Westmoreland County Public School System and as principal in the public school systems of Westmoreland County and Richmond City respectively. She is currently enjoying her sixth year as the principal of Jefferson Elementary School in the Sussex County Public School System. She has 15 years of educational experience within the public school systems of the Commonwealth of Virginia. While in pursuit of a terminal degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, she presented at the UCEA Convention in 2010, the WELV Conference in 2011 and the AREA Convention in 2011 regarding African American female superintendents and the impact of spirituality on their leadership practices. Shannon Smith was inducted into the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi in 2010.